

NEWS BRIEF

CITIZEN ARRESTED FOR MURDER

Muscat - A citizen was arrested for stabbing to death an Omani woman on Monday, according to Royal Oman Police (ROP).

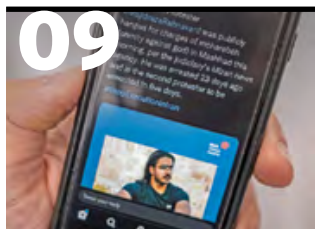
A statement issued by ROP said, 'A citizen was arrested on charges of committing the murder of an Omani woman with a white weapon. The case is under investigation.'

04



Non-oil exports set to record robust growth in 2023

09



Iran defies global outcry with second execution



Royal Decree defines specialisations of Finance Ministry, endorses its organisational structure

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued Royal Decree No 91/2022 on Monday defining the specialisations of the Ministry of Finance and endorsing its organisational structure.

Article 1 defines the specialisations of the Ministry of Finance in accordance with Annex 1 attached to this decree.

Article 2 endorses the organisational structure of the Ministry of Finance in accordance with

Annex 2 attached to this decree.

Article 3 cancels Royal Decree No 39/96 which defined the specialisations of the Ministry of Finance and endorsed its organisational structure. It also cancels all that contradicts this

decree or contravenes its provisions.

Article 4 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of publication.

ONA

Sayyid Bilarab presides over startups summit

Muscat - H H Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said, Honorary President of Rising Omani Startups Programme, presided over the Investment and Startup Summit, organised by the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises (ASMED) on Monday.

The two-day event, held at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, has been organised in co-operation with several government departments.

The summit began with a session titled 'Future of entrepreneurship and startups' which focused on a number of issues, including a discussion on an ecosystem for emerging companies and covered a review of global, regional and local experiences in the field of building and managing startups.

A special session was dedicated to the topic 'Investing in startups' that focused on venture funds, crowdfunding and startup stock exchange. On Day 1, the summit reviewed experiences of successful startups in the global, regional and local arenas.



H H Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said presides over the Investment and Startup Summit on Monday (ONA)

The activities of the second day include a session titled 'Business incubators and accelerators' and a workshop on incentivising the establishment of private investment funds.

The summit will include specialised workshops in which decision makers, investment specialists and representatives of new firms will debate the start-

ups ecosystem in Oman, as well as discuss business accelerators for government and private companies, and the establishment of private investment funds with exclusive branches for startups.

Through the summit, ASMED seeks to spread the culture of startups in the fields of innovation and technology. The summit will provide opportunities to Omani

startups to obtain financing and investment, develop their own systems and define appropriate guidelines and initiatives to support these.

H H Sayyid Bilarab toured an exhibition held on the sidelines of the summit in which 60 startups engaged in the fields of innovation and technology are taking part.



H M CONFERS MEDALS FOR EXCELLENCE IN SERVICE

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, conferred medals of Excellent Service and Royal Commendation on several commissioned and non-commissioned officers and personnel of the Sultan's Armed Forces and other departments of the Ministry of Defence and Royal Guard of Oman. Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, pinned the medals on the military officers and civil personnel in recognition of their loyalty in serving the nation and performing sacred national duty (ONA)

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MUSCAT DAILY PRESENTS



Researcher feted as best speaker in international meet

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Maryam Mohammed al Ghazali was recognised as best speaker in an international online conference held in Paris, France, last month.

The 2nd International Conference on Nutraceuticals and Food Science focused on finding natural treasures in nutraceuticals and food. Nutraceuticals is a broad umbrella term used to describe any product derived from food sources with extra health benefits in addition to the basic nutritional value found in foods.

Maryam completed a Master's degree at the age of 26 years from Sultan Qaboos University and is head of the microbiology lab at Al Joudah Food Tech Lab. Having published four research papers, which have been cited over 2,000 times, Maryam has participated in numerous conferences and workshops in many countries, including France, Thailand, the UK and the United Arab Emirates.

Maryam participated in the conference with her study titled 'Evaluation of Food Safety Knowledge and Hygienic Practices in restaurants in Muscat, Oman.'

In an interview with Oman TV, Maryam said that the study is the first of its kind in the sultanate focused on finding new standards and specifications related to food safety and comparing these with international standards.

"The study aimed to evaluate food safety knowledge and hygienic practices in 18 restaurants in three different regions of the Governorate of Muscat. It looked



(Supplied photo)

We must have a role as Omani researchers in benefiting from the experiences of others

MARYAM AL GHAZALI

into the quality of the restaurants in the context of prevalence of food poisoning cases which have increased in the sultanate in recent years. The number of complaints by consumers of unhealthy practices in places serving food has also increased," Maryam said.

"New recommendations were suggested to Muscat Municipal-

ity to be enforced as new regulations/rules in the future."

She explained that the results of the study showed that the knowledge and health practices of all the restaurants that were selected for the study are highly interconnected.

Maryam recommended training courses to enhance knowledge and health practices for food handlers.

According to Maryam, if the level of knowledge of food handlers increases, good health practices will increase.

Of the future, she said, "We must have a role as Omani researchers in benefiting from the experiences of others and learning about the findings of modern science in the field of food science."

Sayyid Asaad bids farewell to Italian ambassador

Muscat - On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Co-operation Affairs and Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, received in his office on Monday Federica Favi, Ambassador of Italy to Oman, to bid her farewell at the end of her tour of duty.

The ambassador expressed her thanks to His Majesty the Sultan for the support extended to her in the sultanate from His Majesty, the government and the Omani people, which enabled her to carry out her duties.

The ambassador also wished His Majesty good health, happiness and a long life and the sultanate further development and



growth under the wise leadership of His Majesty.

On his turn, Sayyid Asaad conveyed his appreciation of the ambassador for the efforts she

exerted in serving the relations between Oman and Italy. He also wished her success and the Italian people further progress and prosperity.

The meeting was attended by the Secretary-General and the adviser at the Office of Sayyid Asaad. ONA

MHUP signs agreement for home financing solutions

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Contributing towards the development of the Omani real estate sector, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Sohar Islamic to enable Omanis to own homes. The scope of the memorandum includes financing beneficiaries of the Naseem neighbourhood, the first community neighbourhood of the Sorouh initiative launched by the ministry and similar projects.

The agreement was signed by H E Hamad Ali Sulaiman al Nazwani, Undersecretary for Housing in MHUP, and Fahad al Zadjali, Head of Retail Banking and Branches at Sohar Islamic. The signing ceremony took place on the ministry's premises in the presence of senior officials of MHUP and the bank.

As per the terms of the MoU, Sohar Islamic customers can now obtain quick, easy and convenient property financing solutions from the bank to purchase property that is either under construction or fully completed which fall under the ministry's Sorouh initiative.



Our MoU with MHUP will also contribute to meeting the growing demand for Sharia-compliant financing solutions

ABDUL WAHID AL MURSHIDI

tiative.

Commenting on the signing of the MoU, Abdul Wahid al Murshidi, Chief Islamic Banking Officer at Sohar International, said, "As a progressive, agile and dynamic bank, Sohar Islamic is in line with the government's efforts to enhance the pace of real estate development and achieve the objectives of the comprehensive urban strategy in the sultanate.

Our partnership with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning will not only give an impetus to the real estate sector but will also contribute to meeting the growing demand for Sharia-compliant financing solutions in the sector."

Launched in 2019, the Sorouh initiative is a key national endeavour that was conceptualised to support the existing housing policies, provide eligible citizens with

comfortable and affordable housing alternatives, and reduce the demand for land by citizens. The initiative includes provision of integrated residential complexes with modern specifications to provide stability for citizens.

With the MoU in place, Sohar Islamic will provide the needed support to citizens to conveniently acquire a property of their choice in one of the many housing projects under the Sorouh initiative.

"With an expansive suite of innovative financing instruments that adhere to the norms of Islamic finance, the bank seeks to provide customised, end-to-end services that add value to the lives of its customers. Sohar Islamic will continue to remain vigilant of the changes in the economic landscape, leverage opportunities and focus on initiatives that have a sustainable impact on society," Murshidi added.

The Sorouh integrated residential neighbourhood projects have been planned in the governorates of Musandam, Dhofar, South Sharqiyah, North Sharqiyah, South Batinah and North Batinah.

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Violation notices issued against shops in Bahla

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Dakhliyah Municipality on Monday carried out an inspection campaign among cafes and restaurants in the wilayat of Bahla to ensure these adhere to the necessary health requirements.

As a result, the civic body issued violation notices against two shops, destroyed 25kg of unfit food and seized kitchen equipment not suitable for food preparation.

Public health regulations require adherence to guidelines and requirements for both service providers and clients. These include frequent disinfection of all surfaces, ensuring proper ventilation and provision of appropriate personal protective equipment to each worker/employee.

Trend Micro safeguards Oman from over 5.7mn cyber attacks, threats

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Trend Micro Incorporated, a global leader in cybersecurity solutions, detected and blocked over 1.8mn email threats in Oman, prevented more than 1.47mn malicious URL victim attacks, and 10,914 URL hosts. In addition, over 1.4mn malware attacks were identified and stopped.

According to Trend Micro report, Oman blocked a total of 67,258 SHN inbound and outbound attacks and prevented 19,373 SHN events for hackers to target or control home devices from executing malware, obtaining sensitive information, intercepting communications, or launching external attacks.

"Omani enterprises have valiantly fought against a rapidly evolving threat landscape, yet challenges remain in protecting the expanding attack surface," said Assad Arabi, managing director Gulf Cluster, Trend Micro. "To safeguard digital environ-

ments, it is essential to implement multilayered cyber security. The most recent midyear report is a crucial resource for guiding organisations toward a smarter and more powerful approach against future security challenges in the digital sphere."

There are new ransomware groups emerging every day. In the first half of this year, Black Basta was the most notable. Even though SMBs are a more popular target, many threat actors tend to go for large corporations. Vulnerability exploitation is a common ransomware attack vector. Unpatched vulnerabilities contribute to a growing digital attack surface that many organisations are struggling to secure as hybrid workplaces expand their IT environment. More than two-fifths of global organisations (43 per cent) believe it is 'spiralling out of control'.

Cloud visibility is crucial given the persistent risk posed by third parties using methods like cloud-based crypto mining and cloud tunneling.

MHT to set up archaeological centre for tourists in Dibba

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) will establish an archaeological centre for visitors in Dibba in the Governorate of Musandam with an aim to stimulate domestic tourism in the area.

"MHT has invited international companies to set up Dabba Archaeological Visitor Centre in Musandam governorate," said a ministry official.

The initiative comes within the context of a comprehensive system to develop and renew plans and programmes being conducted by the ministry to promote the sultanate's tourism.

The last date for submission of bids is January 17, 2023.

The ministry confirmed that Dibba is considered one of the most important archaeological sites in the sultanate.

The centre will be the first of



its kind in the sultanate and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. It will display the antiquities unearthed from the site.

Musandam is known for its geographical location and di-

verse terrain, holding immense tourism potential. Before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the governorate used to attract 200,000 tourists annually. Musandam's castles used to

get as many as 50,000 visitors annually, while the number of cruise passengers to the governorate had reached 129,453.

In another tourism-related development in the governorate,

The centre will be the first of its kind in the sultanate and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. It will display the antiquities unearthed from the site in Dibba

Omran has started implementing the first phase of an adventure centre with a 1,500m zip line. It will begin at the top of a mountain at a height of 250m above sea level. The project is expected to be complete in 2022.

Among the historical monuments, Musandam has four castles and forts, in addition to a museum in the wilayat of Madha.

Oman, Tanzania review areas of cooperation in commerce



Muscat - Qais Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion received Dr Stergomena Lawrence Tax, Minister of Foreign Affairs and East African Cooperation of Tanzania, in the former's office in Muscat on Monday.

The meeting reviewed areas of cooperation between the two countries in commerce and in-

The two sides also discussed the potential of establishing direct shipping lines between the ports of the two countries for export and import

vestment sectors. It also touched on the means of boosting the bilateral relations and augmenting volume of trade exchange.

The two sides also discussed the potential of establishing di-

rect shipping lines between the ports of the two countries to import agricultural and animal products from Tanzania, as well as exporting iron and aluminium products from Oman.

The meeting was attended by Pankaj Khimji, Foreign Trade and International Cooperation Advisor at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion; Saud Hilal al Shithani, Ambassador of Oman to Tanzania; Abdullah Kilima, Ambassador of Tanzania to Oman and a number of other officials from the two sides. ONA

MoH launches lab to attract investments

Muscat - In line with Oman Vision 2040, the Ministry of Health (MoH) with the support of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit and Oman National Investment Program 'Nazdaher' has launched an investment laboratory in the health sector recently.

The one month laboratory aims to attract investments in the health sector, improve health services by enhancing health and public enablers, as well as techniques and innovations.

The investment lab aims to develop partnerships in a competitive environment. The lab focused on involving leading private institutions in discussion sessions with the presence of 42 investors from Oman and abroad during the first week of the lab.

Several induction briefings and meetings with investors were also conducted. These meetings touched upon the most important pillars of the lab, such as challenges facing investment in the health sector, and difficulties in the implementation of some projects in this sector.

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MARKET WATCH

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FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)

Indian	214.89
Pakistan	584.47
Bangladesh	267.63
Philippines	144.65
Sri Lanka	955.17

*Rates as on December 12

Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Dubai's GDP grows 4.6%

Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed al Maktoum, Crown Prince of Dubai and chairman of The Executive Council, announced that Dubai's GDP grew 4.6 per cent year-on-year to AED307.5bn during the first nine months of 2022 compared with the same period last year.

Sheikh Hamdan noted that Dubai's exceptional GDP growth was the result of the efforts of various government and private entities to achieve the vision of Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, to make Dubai's economy a global benchmark in sustainability and resilience.

Sheikh Hamdan added that Dubai's responsive and efficient economic framework, along with its ability to track and anticipate demand trends in both the short and long terms, ensure that it can swiftly leverage opportunities and continue its ambitious journey to excellence.

Oman's non-oil exports set to record robust growth in 2023

Our Correspondent

Muscat

Oman's non-oil exports will continue to post robust performance in 2023 as more production capacity is expected to become available for export in the mining, plastics and chemicals sectors, according to Fitch Solutions, a leading global provider of economic research.

Fitch Solutions has revised up its 2023 forecast for Oman's current account surplus from 3.9 per cent of GDP to 5.1 per cent of GDP due to its more bullish outlook for non-hydrocarbon exports.

"We expect non-hydrocarbon exports will continue to post robust performance in 2023, which will more than offset the [expected] decline in hydrocarbon exports. We hold a more bullish view on non-hydrocarbon exports in 2023 as we think more production capacity will become available for export in the mining, plastics and chemicals sectors," Fitch Solutions said in a research note.

Oman's trade data for the first eight months of 2022 showed that non-hydrocarbon exports, particularly minerals and plastics, continued to surprise to the upside, growing by a staggering 48.6 per cent year-on-year in the January - August



Fitch Solutions expects Oman's non-hydrocarbon exports to increase to an all-time high of 27% of GDP in 2023, and offset the expected decline in hydrocarbon exports

Minerals has already launched a bidding block for four mining sites back in April 2022, with three more sites made available for investment in October. Similarly, OQ Group has continued investing in additional production capacity for plastics, with the establishment of a plastics park in Sohar Industrial City in partnership with the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn).

Fitch Solutions also estimates a significant increase in Oman's chemicals production after ammonia production started at OQ's Dhofar plant in September

2022.

"These efforts will increase non-hydrocarbon exports to an all-time high of 26.9 per cent of GDP in 2023, and offset the decline in hydrocarbon exports. As a result, we expect total exports will increase from 59.8 per cent of GDP in 2022 to 60.4 per cent in 2023," Fitch Solutions noted.

While Oman has a diversified set of export partners, a sharper-than-expected decrease in global economic growth could weigh on non-hydrocarbon exports, Fitch Solutions warned.

Fitch Solutions expects import growth in 2023 will outpace

export growth, thus shrinking the sultanate's current account surplus.

"At Fitch Solutions, we forecast Oman's current account surplus will narrow from a decade high of 7.7 per cent of GDP 2022 to 5.1 per cent in 2023. We have increased our 2022 estimate and 2023 forecasts from 7.1 per cent and 3.9 per cent, respectively, as we now foresee stronger hydrocarbon exports in both years," it said.

As per Fitch Solutions' forecasts, Oman's imports will rise from 32.7 per cent of GDP in 2022 to 35.7 per cent in 2023 due to strong capital imports, reducing the surplus in the goods trade surplus.

"We believe a strong investment drive will keep import growth elevated as the government seeks to diversify sources of economic activity. This will add to a weaker dollar, which will increase Oman's import prices by virtue of the sultanate's currency peg," Fitch Solutions said.

Although overall imports will increase, a decline in global commodity prices along with favourable base effects will lead to a deceleration in import growth from 27.8 per cent in 2022 to 12.2 per cent in 2023, Fitch Solutions added.

Taageer Finance bond issue subscribed by 195%

Muscat - Taageer Finance, one of the leading finance and leasing company in Oman, announced the successful closure of its two-year OMR denominated bond issue.

The bond issue was successfully closed with a subscription rate of 195 per cent, reflecting strong investors confidence for the company's fundraising activities for the second time in succession.

The bond issuance, which has a two-year tenor, is listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange and the funds raised will be used to support the business growth for the Company.

Shahin al Balushi, CEO of Taageer Finance, said, "This recent issuance marks another successful milestone for Taageer Finance. Furthermore, it is in line with the board's vision, focusing on the need for diversification of funding avenues and for the company to expand and enhance their position and capabilities to finance small and medium businesses."

PDO to support establishing local manufacturing facilities in Oman

Muscat - Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) on Monday signed a memorandum of collaboration (MoC) with Borets to establish local manufacturing facilities in Oman to produce permanent magnet motors (PMM) and industrial power cables, including electric submersible pump (ESP) cables, a first in the region.

The two manufacturing facilities are expected to operate with an annual capacity of 3,000 km of power cables and 2,400 PMMs. They will jointly create around 180 job opportunities with an Omanisation rate of up to 85 per cent within five years of commercial operations.

PDO's external affairs and value creation director Eng Abdul-Amir al Ajmi, who signed

the agreements on behalf of PDO, said, "The signing of this agreement strengthens PDO's

commitment to driving ICV in well engineering, and it marks another milestone in expanding local capabilities in this key industry."

He said, "The facilities are expected to enhance supply chain value, serve local and regional demand for industrial power cable and PMMs. and they also provide a great opportunity in terms of technology transfer and creation of employment."

Borets CEO Vlad Kondratiev said, "Borets is excited to be part of this promising initiative and looks forward to manufacturing its top quality products in Oman."



5G subscriptions in GCC to grow 30% annually

Dubai, UAE - The new edition of Ericsson's Mobility Report forecasts that 5G subscriptions in the GCC region are projected to grow steadily at an average annual rate of 30 per cent, from 15mn to 71mn up to the end of 2028, accounting for 86 per cent of total connections at that time.

Currently, 4G accounts for 72 per cent of mobile subscriptions in the GCC with 5G at 20 per cent of the total mobile subscriptions. With the expected growth of 5G subscriptions, 4G subscriptions are expected to decline from 55mn in 2022 to 8mn in 2028. The monthly data traffic per smartphone in the GCC will almost double from 25 GB per month in 2022 to around 53 GB per month in 2028.

In a press release, Nicolas Blixell, vice president and head of GCC countries at Ericsson Middle East and Africa, said, "As communication service providers explore diverse service offerings, 5G is anticipated to be the segment with the fastest growth. The demand for and growth of Fixed Wireless Access is also exceeding our expectations, as depicted by the latest Ericsson Mobility Report. It is worth noting that we have observed communication service providers in the region increasingly building on B2B opportunities as well."

Global 5G subscriptions remain on track to top one billion by the end of this year, and five billion by the end of 2028, despite current and developing economic challenges in many parts of the world. By the end of 2028, five billion 5G subscriptions are forecast globally, accounting for 55 per cent of all subscriptions.

In that same timeframe, 5G population coverage is projected to reach 85 per cent while 5G networks are expected to carry around 70 per cent of mobile traffic and account for all contemporary traffic growth.

On 5G itself, about 110mn subscriptions were added globally between July-September 2022, bringing the total to about 870mn. As forecast in previous reports, 5G is still expected to reach one billion subscriptions by the end of this year - two years faster than 4G did, following its launch. The statistic reinforces 5G as the fastest-scaling mobile connectivity generation.

Overall mobile subscriptions are expected to top 8.4bn by the end of 2022, and 9.2bn by the end of 2028. Most subscriptions are associated with smartphones. At the end of 2022, 6.6bn smartphone subscriptions are estimated, accounting for about 79 per cent of all mobile phone subscriptions.

The report also forecasts global fixed wireless access (FWA) connections to grow faster than previously expected. FWA - the wireless alternative to wireline broadband connectivity for homes and businesses - is one of the major early 5G use cases, particularly in regions with unserved or underserved broadband markets. FWA is forecast to grow at 19 per cent year-on-year through 2022-28, and top 300mn connections by the end of 2028.

The latest report also highlights the importance of reducing environmental impact. The telecommunications sector has a key role to play in addressing global sustainability goals, both by reducing its own emissions and through its potential to reduce carbon emissions across other industries.

To reduce the environmental impact, the growing data traffic needs to be managed with smart network modernization combined with a balanced approach to network performance.

NLGIC Group's financial strength rating upgraded by AM Best

Our Correspondent

Muscat

National Life & General Insurance Co Group (NLGIC Group) - a leading insurer in the Middle East and the largest insurance group in Oman - on Monday announced that its financial strength rating has been upgraded from B++ (Good) to A- (Excellent) by the global credit rating agency AM Best.

The move also saw NLGIC Group's long-term issuer credit rating revised upwards to A- (Excellent) from BBB+ and its outlook revised to stable, indicating superior financial health.

The key drivers for the revised outlook, according to the AM Best report, are NLGIC Group's balance sheet strength, as well as its strong operating performance, neutral business profile and appropriate enterprise risk management.

The AM Best report also con-

Martin Rueegg

firming that NLGIC's recent purchase of RSA Middle East has been a central reason for the strengthening of NLGIC Group's business profile, providing both product and geographical diversification and consolidating NLGIC Group's position in its existing markets.

Notably, AM Best reported that the company has a track record of strong operating profitability, demonstrated by a five-year (2017-2021) weighted

Rating reflects NLGIC Group's robust financial profile, strong operating performance and appropriate enterprise risk management strategy

average return-on-equity ratio of 17.7 per cent. This historical operating profitability has been driven by strong underwriting results from the company's non-life portfolio, evidenced by a five-year (2017-2021) weighted average combined ratio of 92.6 per cent.

In a press statement, Martin Rueegg, group CEO of NLGIC Group, said, "The revisions to NLGIC's outlook reaffirms the success of the purchase of RSA

Middle East, which resulted in the formation of NLGIC Group. This newly formed entity has created a leading multi-line insurer with a wide geographical footprint and strong in-country operations that leave the company exceptionally well-positioned for stability over economic cycles. The AM Best upgrade also confirms that the integration of RSA Middle East is fully aligned with our growth strategy, our plans to strengthen our market position in the GCC and our ability to widen our customer base."

"As we gear up for next year, this credit rating sends strong signals on how we should proceed in the future as we expand our portfolio and position ourselves as a leading multi-line insurer in the region. With our solid financial footing, we are confident in our abilities to deliver strong results in the coming year."

ECB mulls rate hike slowdown on 'peak inflation' hopes

Frankfurt, Germany - Growing hopes that the eurozone's red-hot inflation is nearing its peak could prompt European Central Bank policymakers to opt for a smaller rate hike on Thursday, observers said.

Following two consecutive interest rate hikes of 75 basis points, markets are on tenterhooks to see whether the ECB will keep up the aggressive pace or downshift to 50 basis points as the region braces for a winter recession.

This week's meeting of the ECB's 25-member governing council in Frankfurt will be the final one of 2022, a year that will be remembered for unprecedented consumer price shocks as Russia's war in Ukraine sent food and energy costs soaring.

Like other central banks, the ECB has fought back with a series of interest rate rises - walking a tightrope between raising borrowing costs enough to tame inflation, without dampening demand so much it triggers a deep economic downturn.

ECB governors may take heart from November's eurozone inflation data, which showed prices slowing for the first time in 17 months on the back of cooling energy costs.

Inflation remains eye-wateringly high, however, at 10 per cent - five times the ECB's tar-



get - and president Christine Lagarde has repeatedly said further rate hikes are needed.

But the rare bit of good news has bolstered hopes that price pressures are finally easing in the 19-nation in currency club.

"I would be reasonably confident in saying that it is likely we are close to peak inflation," the ECB's chief economist Philip Lane said last week.

The early Christmas present could "take away some of the urgency to continue with jumbo rate hikes," said ING bank economist Carsten Brzeski, even if a 75-basis-point hike is "still on the table".

Andrew Kenningham, chief

Europe economist at Capital Economics, said he expected the ECB "to slow the pace to 50 basis points".

Observers may look across the Atlantic for clues on Wednesday, when the US Federal Reserve is set to announce its latest monetary policy decisions.

The Fed, which began hiking earlier and faster than the ECB, has signalled it could scale back the pace of its rate increases.

Recession fears

The ECB's rate decision will be guided by the latest economic forecasts due to be unveiled on Thursday.

Analysts expect them to show that inflation will remain well above the two-percent target in 2023 before falling back in 2024 and 2025.

The eurozone economy is seen shrinking in the final quarter of 2022 and the first months of 2023, meeting the technical definition of a recession.

Berenberg Bank economist Holger Schmieding said he expected "a significant winter recession for the eurozone as consumers and businesses hold back".

But with governments rolling out massive support packages and gas storage levels above average for this time of the year,

"the region is better prepared for the cold season than expected", he added.

Schmieding urged the ECB not to "overdo its response to inflation", warning that aggressive rate hikes would make the recession "even more painful".

As part of its monetary policy tightening, the ECB will on Thursday outline the next steps in its efforts to slim down the bank's massive balance sheet.

It has already made changes to the terms of an ultra-cheap bank loan scheme, aimed at keeping credit flowing during the pandemic, in a bid to incentivise early repayment of the so-called TLTRO loans.

The move appears to be paying off, with eurozone lenders handing back nearly 750bn euros (US\$790bn) in TLTRO cash since October.

Analysts are also eager to hear how and when the ECB plans to start shrinking its five-trillion-euro bond portfolio, after years of hoovering up government and corporate debt.

The issue will be discussed at this week's meeting, Lagarde has said.

The ECB has already indicated that the process of "quantitative tightening" - letting the bonds mature or actively selling them - would be gradual and predictable to avoid spooking financial markets.

AFP



US biopharma firm Amgen plans \$28bn acquisition

New York, US - The US biopharmaceutical firm Amgen said Monday it has reached agreement to acquire Horizon Therapeutics, which specialises in medicine for rare and auto-immune diseases, for US\$27.8bn.

This is the biggest acquisition of the year in the health sector.

California-based Amgen said it will pay cash to the tune of US\$116.50 a share in Horizon Therapeutics, a 20 per cent premium over its closing price Friday on Wall Street.

Amgen said it will finance the deal with a US\$28.5bn loan from a bank.

The deal is subject to approval by US regulators and if all goes well it should be concluded in the first half of 2023, Amgen said.

Founded in 2005, Horizon Therapeutics develops and markets drugs for rare, auto-immune and inflammatory illnesses. It is best known for

making Tepezza, which is used to treat thyroid eye disease.

Shares in Horizon Therapeutics, which has its head office in Ireland but is listed on the Nasdaq index, shot up 15 per cent in electronic trading prior to the opening bell on Monday.

Shares in Amgen were down 2.6 per cent.

Responding to an article in The Wall Street Journal, Horizon Therapeutics said last month it was in preliminary talks with Amgen but also with Johnson & Johnson and the French company Sanofi.

"The acquisition of Horizon is a compelling opportunity for Amgen and one that is consistent with our strategy of delivering long-term growth by providing innovative medicines that address the needs of patients who suffer from serious diseases," Amgen CEO Robert Bradway said.

AFP

Oil prices rise on supply concerns

Ankara, Turkey - Oil prices rose on Monday due to supply concerns as the Keystone pipeline in the US was shut down due to the largest crude oil spills in roughly ten years, while tensions in the Russia-Ukraine war rose as Russia threatened to cut production in response to the price cap on its oil exports.

International benchmark Brent crude traded at US\$76.50 per barrel on Monday late morning, up 0.52 per cent from the closing price of US\$76.10 a barrel in the previous trading session.

At the same time, American benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) traded at US\$71.61 per barrel, a 0.83 per cent gain after the previous session closed at US\$71.02 a barrel. The closure of the Keystone pipeline in the aftermath of the largest oil spill in a decade increased supply pressure, which many experts believe could lead to a crude supply shortage in the US.

"We have not confirmed a



timeline for re-start and will only resume service when it is safe to do so and with the approval of the regulator," the pipeline owner, TC Energy of Canada, said.

The pipeline closure, which carries more than 600,000 barrels of crude oil a day to refineries in the US Gulf Coast, is estimated to lead to shortages at two US oil refineries.

Meanwhile, supply fears further increased after Russian President Vladimir Putin denounced the West's decision to impose a price cap on Russian oil exports as "silly, harmful, and ill-considered," and said Russia could cut oil production and will refuse to sell oil to any country

that imposes the price cap on Russian oil.

His remarks came after the EU countries agreed last week to a US\$60 per barrel price cap for Russian crude oil exports transported by sea, which has since been joined by the G7 countries and Australia.

The Russian president warned that lower prices would deprive the energy sector of investment, which could lead to shortages and "skyrocketing prices."

Putin claimed that the country would not suffer losses from the US\$60 limit because it is close to the price that Russia normally charges for its oil.

Anadolu Agency

UK economy stuck on recession path despite growth rebound

London, UK - Britain's economy remains on course for a long-lasting recession on fallout from the highest inflation in decades, analysts said on Monday, even if official data showed growth in October.

Gross domestic product rebounded 0.5 per cent in the month, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said. GDP had dropped 0.6 per cent in September, in part owing to businesses closing for the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II.

ONS director of economic statistics, Darren Morgan, said the economy was helped in October especially by car sales which "rebounded after a very poor September, while the health sector also saw a strong month".

Despite the rebound, Britain's finance minister Jeremy Hunt spoke of "a tough road ahead".

"High inflation, exacerbated by (Russian President Vladimir) Putin's illegal war, is slowing



growth across the world, with the IMF predicting a third of the world economy will be in recession this year or next," he said in a statement. The UK government and Bank of England have each said they believe Britain is already in a recession that the BoE expects to last all next year.

The main reason for the bleak outlook is fallout from British in-

reopening of economies from pandemic lockdowns.

Britain's economy has further been hit by recent political turmoil and surging interest rates to try and cool inflation.

Rate hikes

The Bank of England is on Thursday expected to raise its main interest rate for a ninth meeting in a row.

"The surprisingly strong rise (in October GDP) could tilt the Bank of England towards another bumper 75 basis-points interest rate hike... depending on the labour market and inflation data on Tuesday and Wednesday," noted Ruth Gregory, senior economist at Capital Economics.

Analysts are forecasting the Federal Reserve and European Central Bank to announce smaller rate hikes at their meetings this week compared with recent decisions.

AFP

Markets decline ahead of key rate decisions

London, UK - European stock markets dropped Monday following losses in Asia, as investors looked ahead to interest rate decisions this week from major central banks including the Federal Reserve.

The dollar traded mixed against its main rivals, while oil prices retreated further following sharp falls last week.

Analysts are forecasting the Fed and the European Central Bank to announce smaller rate hikes at their meetings this week compared with recent decisions.

The Bank of England is meanwhile on course for a ninth increase in a row as policymakers try to bring down inflation from the highest levels in decades.

"Following a softer session in



Asia, European markets are on edge, opening the week lower ahead of a critical few days for central bank action," noted Victoria Scholar, head of investment at Interactive Investor.

"The ECB, the Fed and the Bank of England are expected to raise rates by 50 basis points each as the pace of tightening looks set to slow."

The half-point jumps will still be steep rises, however, as central banks struggle to cool the

pace of price increases, particularly regarding energy and food.

Ahead of the Fed's policy meeting, investors were set to digest US inflation data due Monday.

Traders were keeping an eye also on developments in China as it moves away from the zero-Covid policy that has hammered its economy, the world's second largest after the United States.

The shift comes after widespread protests against the near

three-year strategy, though there is concern about the expected spike in infections.

Uncertainty surrounding the strength of China's demand recovery has hit oil prices hard, with crude futures shedding more than 10 per cent last week.

"The gradual easing of Chinese Covid restrictions is... expected to lead to a further upswing in demand," said Susannah Streeter, senior investment and markets analyst at Hargreaves Lansdown.

"However, concerns about the rapid spread of the virus remain, and China will have a tough fight on its hands, dealing with an expected explosion of infections while trying to open up the economy."

AFP

Microsoft to buy minor stake in London Stock Exchange

London, UK - US software giant Microsoft will buy a four-per cent stake in the London Stock Exchange Group under a new IT services tie-up, the pair announced Monday.

The long-term partnership focuses "next-generation data and analytics and cloud infrastructure solutions" including artificial intelligence (AI), a statement said.

Microsoft will acquire a holding worth £1.5bn (US\$1.8bn) at current prices, while London Stock Exchange Group (LSEG) committed to spending a minimum of US\$2.8bn on cloud-related services.

The tie-up will help LSEG further integrate Refinitiv, the US fi-



nancial data provider it purchased last year, and boost revenue growth.

"This... is a significant milestone on LSEG's journey towards becoming the leading global financial markets infrastructure and data business," said its chief executive David Schwimmer.

Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella said in the statement that ad-

vances in cloud and AI technology would "fundamentally transform how financial institutions research, interact, and transact".

LSEG shares jumped 2.7 per cent to £76 on London's benchmark FTSE 100 index, which was down slightly overall.

That gave it a stock market capitalisation of about £37.3bn.

AFP



ICAI seminar calls for synergies to boost economy, social development

A two-day international seminar has called for building greater synergies and multi-stakeholder equitable partnerships among institutions to achieve sustainable economic and social development.

Organised by the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) Muscat Chapter - under the sponsorship of the College of Banking and Financial Studies-CBFS - at Crowne Plaza Muscat on December 9 and 10, the seminar - entitled 'CA- Success through Synergy' - emphasised on the significance of strengthening synergies between accounting professionals and various institutions in a fast-changing global environment.

H E Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation; and Indian Ambassador H E Amit Narang presided over the seminar.

"Building greater synergies between higher education, research and innovation is crucial in a knowledge-based economy. We must strive hard to strengthen the synergies among various institutions. Enhancing human capital is the need of the hour for all institutions, and through synergies such as multi-stakeholder equitable partnerships, we can make a difference in the lives of others and achieve all-round economic and social development," said H E Dr Rahma.

Dr Zahran al Salti, Dean of CBFS; Dr Debashis Mitra, President of ICAI; and Aniket Sunil Talati, Vice President of ICAI were the guests of honour at the seminar. Mohsin bin Khamis al Balushi, former advisor to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion; Anis Moosa al Lawati, Deputy Dean, CBFS; and Yasser al Kalbani, Assistant Dean, CBFS also graced the occasion with their presence.

Welcoming guests, Sajeew Surendran, Chairperson, ICAI Muscat Chapter said, "It is our endeavour to maximise success through synergies in our core areas of expertise. Openness and international cooperation among accounting professionals are

needed more than ever to improve the economic and business environment and the lives of people everywhere.

"Let's unleash the economic potential and help societies make a big step towards sustainable development. Let's join hands in our efforts towards a better and sustainable future for all."

An informative discussion on 'Oman Vision 2040', moderated by Fatick Hussain al Balushi, CFO of Oman Cement Company SAOG, examined the significance of various pillars of Oman's future economic and social development. Abdul Razzaq al Balushi, CFO, Ooredoo Oman; Jayaprakash Menon, CEO, Mohsin Haider Darwish LLC

(ITICS); and Mubeen Khan, former chairman, ICAI Muscat Chapter were the panelists.

More than two-hundred delegates, including CEOs, CFOs, and various other dignitaries from the public and private sectors attended the informative seminar.

Eminent speakers, who spoke during the event, are Dr T P Anand, Chief Strategist, Leap Business Excellence Advisory FZE; Nihar Jambusaria, former president of ICAI; Leen Kumar Sugumaran, Chief Risk Officer, Bank Dhofar; Dr Ashminder Singh Bahal, Dean - Centre of Excellence, ICAI; and Dr K Rama Subramaniam, Cyber Criminologist, Information Security and Digital Forensic Consultant.

MENA karting championship set to kick-start today



The five-day long Middle East and North African Karting Championship Nations Cup 2022 will kick-start at the Muscat Speedway Circuit at Oman Automobile Association on Tuesday, the organisers said.

Hosting their third season of the championship this year, Oman Automobile Association (OAA) welcomed drivers from all over the world to take part in this challenging series being held from December 13 to 17.

Registrations for the championship was open for international candidates, which led to 138 qualified drivers entering the competition from 15 different countries around the world.

OAA managing director Sulaiman al Rawahi said, "I have to say, it has been a pleasure hosting this competition for the past three years and this year we

hope it to be one of the best.

"The drivers who have come here to compete have shown us all the potential they hold, and with each year, you see them better than before. The stakes are high and the competition gets tough, and in this kind of championship it is difficult to say who will take home the winning cup."

There will be eight karting categories in which the drivers will be separated into: DD1, DD2 Master, RD1 Sprint, RD1 Endurance, Junior Max, Mini Max and Max.

"We are looking forward to what this competition will bring with famous drivers participating including last year's world champion finalist for Mini Max, Christopher Feghali from Lebanon," said Sanad al Rawahi, Muscat Speedway Karting Manager.

National Finance partners with Sharakah to develop SMEs

Through its partnership with Sharakah, National Finance, the leading diversified non-banking finance company in Oman, successfully completed a series of 'Calculate it Right' workshops for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to help them enhance their financial management and planning skills.

The initiative was carried out under 'Imtidad', the company's independent wing for Corporate Social Responsibility for the Fourth consecutive year. The sessions covered various aspects of financial management, such as project costs and sales assumptions.

About 184 participants attended the five workshops that were held in Mussanah, Sur, Nizwa, and Muscat.

Following the feedback gathered from the participants, National Finance and Sharakah have extended their partnership to launch a new initiative that will help six local micro and small enterprises improve their businesses.

The programme, which is known as the SME Growth Pro-



gramme, will provide them with a comprehensive package of financial management and marketing strategies. Spanning over a period of 12 months, the companies will identify areas where the local businesses can improve their operations and make them more profitable. They will then implement effective strategies and procedures to improve their business.

Ali Ahmed Muqaibal, Chief Executive Officer of Sharakah said, "We are pleased to extend

the collaboration with National Finance. We believe that the new program will equip business owners with the necessary skills set in financial management and planning. To assist these small businesses, Sharakah will deploy its Business Performance Monitoring Tool (BPMT), an industry-standard monitoring tool, along with other tools such as the Risk Assessment (RAT) to help improve the overall business profitability."

Tariq al Farsi, Chief Executive

Officer of National Finance said, "We at National Finance, are responsible to support the SME sector in many aspects. It is important for us to help develop businesses that are prospering and competing within the local market.

"We continue our partnership with Sharakah in order to help SMEs and home-based businesses elevate their operations with the right guidance and support, enabling them to be more resilient and successfully deliver their products and services as per the standards required."

National Finance remains committed to its corporate social responsibility by delivering various initiatives. It continues to focus on its commitment to positively impact vital sectors, including education, community, health and environment.

Since its inception in 1987, it has built a reputation as the market leader trusted by thousands of customers across Oman. National Finance offers a wide range of products targeting both individual customers and SMEs through its 21 branches in Oman.



Oman Oasis announces second set of winners of 'BMWM' offer

'Buy More Win More', the much-awaited promotion from Oman Oasis continues to delight loyal customers with exciting prizes. Customers get a chance to participate in the monthly raffle draw by purchasing Oman Oasis, Sifr, or Mai Alkaline drinking water from Lulu, Nesto, Carrefour, Sultan Centre and Makkah Hypermarkets. After the first draw on November 3 to announce 130 winners, the second draw was held on December 5 and a total of 139 lucky winners were announced.

The offer has been successfully running across Oman and will continue till December 31.

Ameer al Mahrizi, Kharen Kay Tero, Muhammad Niyas, Yasir Ali, Omar, Yousuf, and Mohamed Mahmoud Ibrahim Saad were the seven winners of iPhone 13.

In addition, Riham, Connie Mirabeles, Manal Alshidi, and Said al Khanbashi won Lenovo laptops. By participating in the offer, customers can win prizes like iPhone 13s, gold coins, laptops, and fuel coupons.

"We have received a tremendous response from the market for our Buy More Win More promotion and this encourages us to continue delighting our customers with world-class products and exciting offers and prizes to make their purchases a very memorable experience," said N S S Subramaniam, Oman Oasis COO. "There are many more prizes to be won and we urge more and more customers to participate in the raffle draw. My heartiest congratulations to all the lucky winners," he added.

Renault Megane cherished for driving comfort, technology and safety features

With its classy line and uncompromising sense of French flair and style, Renault Megane is among the most exquisite cars found on Oman roads. Cherished for its sleek silhouette, high-tech cockpit and sophisticated styling, Renault Megane sedan continues to grow in popularity.

Owners are also praising Renault Megane for its driving comfort, technology, and safety features.

"Offering a great driving experience and fitted with the latest technology, Renault Megane has won my heart. Attractive and dynamic, Renault Megane makes a bold statement, revealing its performance excellence and high-tech interior," says Ahmed al Wahaibi a long-time owner of the model.

Nasser al Zahil admires Renault Megane sedan for its personality.

Zahil says, "From the dynamic brand light to the ergonomics of the digital instrument panel and the 550-litre boot capacity, it is a masterful example of originality. Behind the wheel, assisted by a set of innovative aids, I enjoy the pleasure of a smooth and relaxed drive."

Faiq al Abri lauds Renault Megane for its best-level low fuel consumption and CO2 emissions. He says, "With its performance excellence and looks, head turner Renault Megane has a style of its own, which is both lively and elegant."

High-status,

convincing, and dynamic, Renault Megane asserts with its great performance. With its slick profile, high-tech cockpit and modern styling, Renault Megane combines style and resourcefulness. Compact body, daring expressive design, as-

sertive style - Renault Megane's lines give a distinguished look for an exhilarating drive.

Yunis al Salehi from Nizwa



favours Renault Megane for its driving comfort and safety features. He says, "Attractive and dynamic, Renault Megane makes a bold statement, unveiling its performance excellence and high-tech interior."

The enigmatic Renault Megane is a real head-turner, says Zahir Taqi who adds, "With its sedan body, dynamic lines and generous proportions, it has a style of its own, both lively and elegant."

A spokesperson for Renault Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA) said,

"Renault Megane is a popular car and much-loved car in the Sultanate. Its energetic lines and substantial proportions add to its increasing popularity with car aficionados in Oman. Megane presents a high-class driving experience, thanks to its technologies, design, and roominess."

High-class driving experience

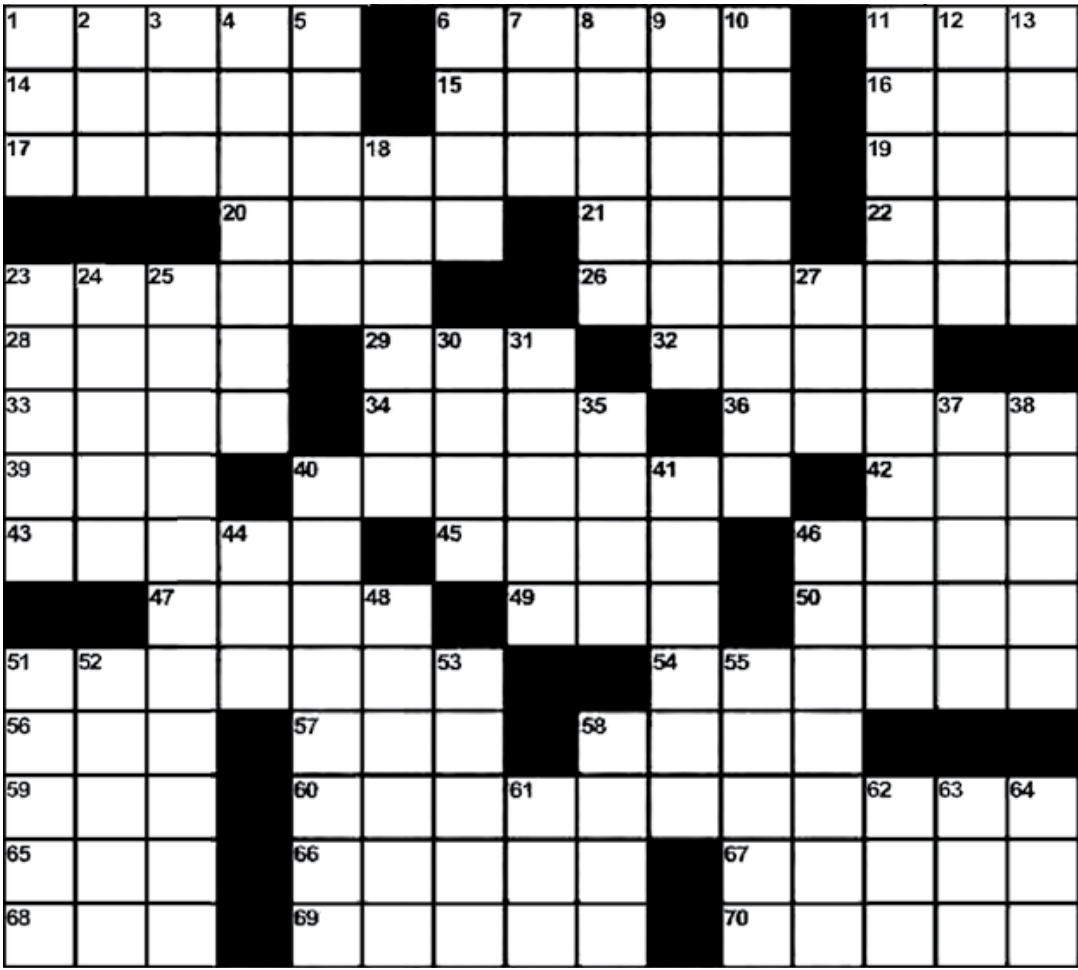
Megane presents a high-class driving experience, thanks to its technologies, design, and roominess. Renault Megane, which is available in 2.0 litres engine configuration along with 1.6 litres variant, is a popular car and much-loved car in the Sultanate."

Renault's designers have drawn upon their acclaimed expertise to seamlessly incorporate

503 dm3 VDA of boot storage capacity without compromising the vehicle's aesthetic appeal. Its generous dimensions (4.63m long and 1.81m wide, with a record wheelbase in its class of 2.71m) underscore its status-enhancing credentials and provide additional room for occupants. Its sleek profile is the result of painstaking work on the proportion of glass to metal (one-third/two-thirds), as well as its low height (1.44m) and ground clearance (13cm).

Fitted as standard either across the range or in the higher-end versions, chrome detailing (grille, side mouldings, door window strips, door handles and exhaust tailpipes) point to the model's quality and reinforce its status-enhancing appeal.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Old counters
- 6) Lock catches
- 11) "How exciting!"
- 14) Boston airport
- 15) Old Roman port
- 16) Employ
- 17) Summary statement
- 19) Can component
- 20) Glassmaker's need
- 21) Witty remark
- 22) " _ the ramparts ... "
- 23) Quantity
- 26) Chinese dish
- 28) Kind of food or music
- 29) Bank offering, for short
- 32) Penetrate slowly
- 33) Food crumbs
- 34) Broadcasts
- 36) Splash haphazardly
- 39) Discouraging words
- 40) Poker dealer's question
- 42) Tax prep. expert
- 43) "Come in!"
- 45) Pressure unit
- 46) "Sure, why not?"
- 4 7) Old Testament book

- 49) Fly catcher
- 50) Neural network
- 51) Out of key
- 54) Ridges on ranges
- 56) _ chi (martial art)
- 57) Knight's title
- 58) Tightly tucked in
- 59) "I" problem
- 60) Like some rights
- 65) Amscrayed on foot
- 66) Resign one's position
- 67) Kind of personality
- 68) " _ show time!"
- 69) Demagnetize, as a tape
- 70) School jottings
- DOWN**
- 1) "Rumble in the Jungle" champ
- 2) " _ voyage!"
- 3) Karim of the Khans, for one
- 4) Soup buys
- 5) Store cremains
- 6) Vast multitude
- 7) _ Wednesday
- 8) Florists cut them
- 9) Aviators
- 10) Most crude, humor-wise
- 11) Certain expenses

- 12) Basket twig
- 13) John the steel-drivin' man
- 18) One-named Venetian master
- 23) All together
- 24) Definitely no Einstein
- 25) Sparsely populated posts
- 27) Fam. member
- 30) Hilariously funny thing
- 31) It points the way
- 35) Tender to the touch
- 37) Sudden outpouring
- 38) "First lady of the theater" Helen
- 40) Burr role
- 41) Refined and polished
- 44) Australian runner
- 46) Pasta sauce herb
- 48) Type of fishing boat
- 51) Where embryos develop
- 52) Annoy persistently
- 53) Kind of queen
- 55) Bad type of sentence
- 58) Locate
- 61) Sue Grafton's " _ for

- Lawless"
- 62) Dracula, at times

- 63) Fabrication
- 64) Triage sites, briefly

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

It's time for you to step in and help out a friend or coworker who is struggling with a high-profile task. Nothing will make you feel better than sharing your ideas and suggestions on how they can make things work better. You'll be amazed by how open-minded and willing they are to hear what you have to say, and this could be a turning point for the two of you. Together, you can elevate the energy level and push beyond any obstacle.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Whether you're guilty of too much shopping, too much eating, or too much self-indulgence, today you need to try to rein it in. It's time to cut out excessive activity and get back to a simpler way of living (at least for now). Try juice instead of wine, a thrift store find instead of something new, a relaxing walk instead of an hour-long massage. All these little substitutions will make you appreciate the pampering all the more.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You have just opened a figurative envelope and will get a tantalizing peek inside it today. You're just starting to get a handle on some neat new things, and you should savor the experience. Try not to rush through everything. Keep that envelope open, but don't pull out what's inside just yet. You could run the risk of overstimulating yourself with input and getting confused. Your curiosity needs to be reined in a bit. Let things unfold as they should and enjoy the show.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

You are your own best teacher in life, so keep that in mind when you encounter an unfamiliar situation today. You should take advantage of this episode by making it a learning opportunity. Ask tough questions, and don't take a simple yes or no for an answer. Make sure you're satisfied by what you're told. If not, keep digging until you find what you need to know. People respect others who accept the fact that they don't know everything.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

In a business or school environment, you're approaching a critical point, but you should look upon this day like any other. The worst thing you can do right now is let yourself get intimidated by certain expectations. If you overthink things, you'll lose perspective and could sell yourself short. If you're feeling a bit uncertain, lean on the folks around you who can help cheer you on or cheer you up. Remember that you know exactly what to do and how to do it.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Yes, things have been a blur lately, but since your emotions are finally starting to slow down, your physical self should too. Relaxation and comfort are more important than speed. Ease off the gas and take the meandering road to your destination. Shortcuts will only frustrate you. Besides, following the scenic route is always more fun. There's no rush, no matter what deadlines you may be facing. You have much more time than you think.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Your latest scheme is an important one, and you are definitely approaching a point of no return on your level of commitment. If you want things to continue, you need to cement yourself into the process. If not, you need to jump ship immediately or else run the risk of getting in too deep, too late. If this plan involves travel, you will have to cast a long, forward look at your calendar to make the time to accomplish goals to your standards.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

If you play your cards right, today could end up being a massive turning point for you. It all depends on who you are around, so surround yourself with creative, romantic people as much as you can. Invite the Universe to do its thing. Try to focus on being open. The less distracted you are, the more likely you'll be able to recognize an unusual invitation or proposal. A door is opening, so get ready to stick your foot in it to keep it from slamming shut again.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Two people in your life need to get together. They either have long-lost connections you don't know about or have yet to meet. But the missing element is definitely you. Have you been contemplating taking on the role as matchmaker? Your hunch might be right on the money. Do not worry about getting in the middle of anything -- you already are in the middle of these two. Today, see what you can do to be the mediator and make yourself a sort of glue between loose factions.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You should be able to sense a new beginning coming soon, perhaps the preparations of others are causing these feelings. Or maybe it's the impetus for your feelings each morning, ready to tackle the big projects of the day but not quite sure what they're going to be. You're definitely ready for anything and in need of stimulation. Don't worry. It's coming soon! Just hold tight and wait.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Today is going to be a quieter day, so don't expect too many challenges. This is a great opportunity for you to evaluate some recent accomplishments in your life. They have put you in an enviable position that carries some responsibility with it. You should plan your next step very carefully. Be honest with yourself and acknowledge your limits. It's important to not bite off more than you can chew right now. This ability to see yourself objectively is a luxury. Take advantage of it.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Being easygoing is nice and all, but today is a day when you should definitely offer your own ideas and take more control. Why not flex your muscles a little bit? It's been too long. You have a lot of good things to say, and it's high time you were the leader. People around you are going to be more receptive to your suggestions, and they're looking for the new ideas that you're sure to have. Push things into the direction you want them to go.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Which is the oldest identified era of activity by homo sapiens and relatives?

- A. Bronze Age
- B. Palaeolithic
- C. Iron Age
- D. Jurassic

02. What sportsman would perform a triple salchow?

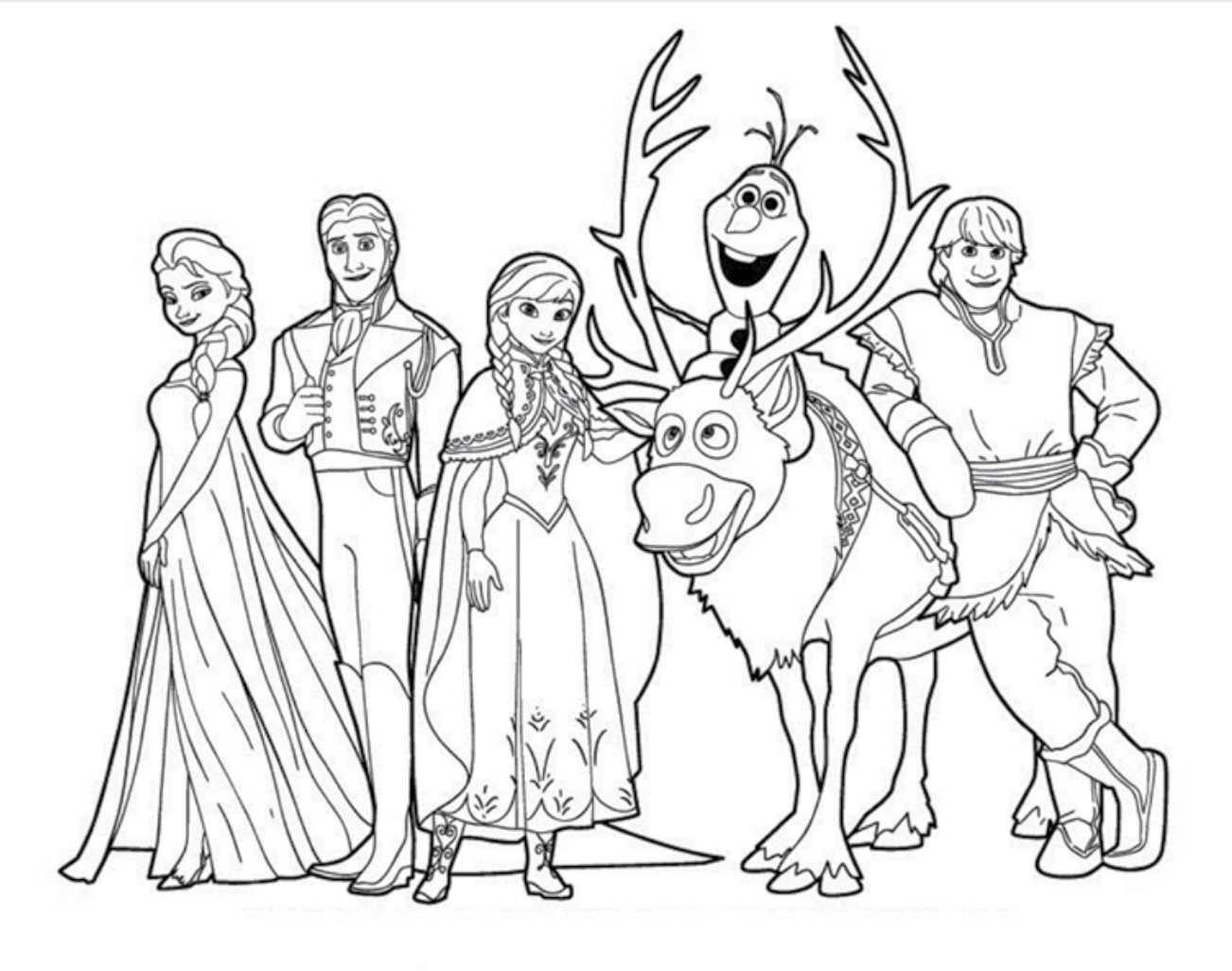
- A. Show jumper
- B. Figure skater
- C. Gymnast
- D. High diver

03. What is the nationality of Mohammed Al Fayed, who sold the department store Harrods Knightsbridge to Qatar Holdings in 2010?

- A. Iranian
- B. Iraqi
- C. Egyptian
- D. Syrian

Answers: 1.B 2.B 3.C

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

E	S	S	A
A	L	S	Qu
U	R	S	I
E	B	L	A

Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long.

Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

DO YOU SUDOKU?

LEVEL EASY: Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9 and only one instance of each number

5	9	3						2
	4	6			3		8	1
			6				3	9
	8			7		3		
			8		6			
		7		2			5	
6	7				1			
4	1		3			6	9	
9						1	2	5

WORD BUILDER



You have three minutes to find all the words contained in this word.

Rules: Words should be at least four letters long, proper nouns and duplicates don't count

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

5	2	1	7	9	4	8	3	6
7	6	9	2	8	3	5	4	1
3	4	8	1	5	6	2	7	9
8	5	6	4	2	1	7	9	3
4	7	2	9	3	8	6	5	1
9	1	3	6	7	4	5	8	2
6	3	7	4	5	1	9	2	8
1	8	5	3	6	2	9	7	4
2	9	4	8	7	1	3	6	5

S Africa's Ramaphosa faces decisive week

Parliament is due to decide on Tuesday whether to greenlight proceedings to remove him from office

Johannesburg, South Africa - Embattled South African President Cyril Ramaphosa faces a decisive week as a scandal hangs over his future, with an impeachment vote on Tuesday preceding a key ruling party conference.

Ramaphosa, who was championed as a graft-busting saviour after the corruption-tainted tenure of predecessor Jacob Zuma, has been marred by accusations that he attempted to cover up a huge cash theft at his luxury farm.

Parliament is due to decide on Tuesday whether to greenlight

proceedings to remove him from office, after a report by an independent panel found that he 'may' be guilty of serious violations and misconduct.

The vote comes just three days before Ramaphosa's party, the African National Congress (ANC), meets for its five-yearly conference to elect a new leader.

The president is the front-runner of the two candidates for the top ANC post - which is also the key to him possibly staying on as head of state for a second term. He was rumoured to be on the verge of resigning earlier this month. But in a show of confidence, he campaigned on the streets of Cape Town over the weekend.

"There's no issue. There's no crisis. Just relax," he told reporters as, greeted like a star by cheers and camera flashes, he shook hands with supporters and patted children's heads.

Renowned for his patience and strategic thinking, Ramaphosa remains popular despite the scandal, attracting a support base crossing South Africa's racial and class divisions.



Supporters of former SA president Jacob Zuma hold a banner reading 'MR PHALAPHALA MUST GO', in reference to a burglary at Cyril Ramaphosa Phalaphala farm, in Kwaximba, south of Durban on December 4 (AFP)

Counter-attack

A simple majority in the National Assembly, where the ANC has 230 of the 400 seats, would be sufficient on Tuesday to initiate the impeachment process.

An impeachment vote itself would need the support of a two-thirds majority of MPs to succeed.

Last week, the 70-year-old president went on the counter-attack, asking the country's top court to annul the investigative report.

The ANC's national executive vowed last week to close ranks around Ramaphosa and vote down any attempt to force him from office.

That decision upset some within the party who said the executive had forced their hand.

Dissenting voices included former health minister Zweli Mkhize, 66, who is challenging Ramaphosa for the ANC leadership. But party officials seem confident there will be insufficient votes in parliament to start

impeachment proceedings.

"(Lawmakers) normally tow the party line. The ANC is on top of it," a senior party official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

The vote might even not happen at all, analysts say.

That would ease pressure on Ramaphosa ahead of the ANC leadership election.

"There is a possibility that the speaker of National Assembly,

tering politics, found himself in hot water in June when South Africa's former spy boss filed a complaint against him to the police. Arthur Fraser alleged Ramaphosa had concealed the theft of several million dollars from his game and rare cattle farm in 2020.

He accused the president of having the burglars kidnapped and bribed into silence.

A police inquiry is ongoing but Ramaphosa has not so far been charged with any crime and has denied wrongdoing.

He has acknowledged the theft of US\$580,000, which was stashed under sofa cushions at his farm, but said the money was payment for buffalo bought by a Sudanese businessman.

The latter, Hazim Mustafa, recently confirmed the transaction in interviews with British media.

Mustafa said he did not know the 20 buffalo belonged to Ramaphosa when he bought them in late 2019 and was waiting for a refund since the animals had not yet been delivered to him in Dubai.

AFP

There's a possibility that the speaker of National Assembly decides to postpone the whole process

WILLIAM GUMEDE

who is a political ally of Ramaphosa, decides to postpone the whole process and says, 'Let's have it next year,' said political scientist William Gumede.

Cash in sofa

The president, who was a wealthy businessman before en-

China faces soaring COVID cases as zero-tolerance policy eases

Beijing, China - COVID cases are surging in the Chinese capital, officials said on Monday, as the country navigates a rapid turn away from its zero-tolerance coronavirus strategy.

Just a few days after China began loosening restrictions, Beijing authorities said more than 22,000 patients had visited hospitals across the city in the previous day - 16 times the number a week ago.

"The current trend of the rapid spread of the epidemic in Beijing still exists," said city health commission spokesman Li Ang at a briefing on Monday.

"The number of fever clinic visits and flu-like cases increased significantly, and the number of... emergency calls increased sharply."

China reported 8,626 domestic infections on Monday but with testing no longer mandatory for much of the population the number is believed to be a lot higher.

As the country steers a tricky



People wait in queue to buy medicine at a pharmacy amid the COVID-19 pandemic in Beijing on Monday (AFP)

path out of its zero-COVID policy towards living with the virus, many with symptoms have opted to self-medicate at home.

Cold and fever medicines have sold out in virtually all pharmacies across Beijing, and rapid antigen tests are dwindling as people stock up in anticipation of a virus surge that threatens the lives of millions of unvaccinated elderly.

Social media users reported a surge of infections in smaller

cities including Baoding in Hebei province and Dazhou in Sichuan, with hospitals inundated and residents unable to buy medicines. AFP was not immediately able to verify the claims.

"It's really serious, the supply of medicine is not enough and it's being managed badly," wrote one person on the Twitter-like platform Weibo.

Lacking adequate medical infrastructure and primary care triage, China's rural interior is

particularly vulnerable to health crises such as COVID.

In a major move towards unwinding years of hardline restrictions, China said on Monday it would retire an app used to track travel to areas with infections.

The state-run 'Communications Itinerary Card' was a central part of zero-COVID, keeping tabs on the movements of millions through their phone signal data.

AFP

NASA capsule Orion splashes down after record-setting lunar voyage

Washington, US - NASA's Orion space capsule splashed down safely in the Pacific on Sunday, completing the Artemis 1 mission - a more than 25-day journey around the Moon with an eye to returning humans there in just a few years.

After racing through the Earth's atmosphere at a speed of 25,000 miles (40,000km) per hour, the uncrewed capsule floated down to the sea with the help of three large orange and white parachutes, as seen on NASA TV.

"I don't think any one of us could have imagined the mission this successful," said Artemis Mission Manager Mike Sarafin in a press conference. "We now have a foundational deep space transportation system."

During the trip around Earth's orbiting satellite and back, Orion logged well over a million miles and went farther from Earth than any previous habitable spacecraft. "For years, thousands of individuals have poured themselves into this mission,



NASA's Orion Capsule is drawn into the well deck of the USS Portland during recovery operations in the Pacific Ocean on Sunday (AFP)

which is inspiring the world to work together to reach untouched cosmic shores," said NASA Administrator Bill Nelson.

"Today is a huge win for NASA, the United States, our international partners, and all of humanity," he added.

After touchdown, helicopters flew over the floating spacecraft, which showed no evidence of damage.

Orion was recovered by a prepositioned US Navy ship off

the coast of Mexico's Baja California after some initial tests were run.

As it reentered the Earth's atmosphere, the gumdrop-shaped capsule had to withstand a temperature of 2,800 degrees Centigrade (5,000 Fahrenheit) - about half that of the surface of the Sun. The main goal of this mission was to test Orion's heat shield - for the day when it carries astronauts.

AFP

New Zealand offers nurses residency to meet shortfall

Wellington, New Zealand - New Zealand on Monday offered overseas nurses and midwives an immediate pathway to residency, as the country tries to address an acute shortfall of medical staff.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said changes to the immigration system meant those eligible can get fast-tracked residency from Thursday. Specialist doctors have also been added to New Zealand's 'Green List', which allows skilled workers in hard-to-fill roles to get residency.

The New Zealand Nurses Organisation estimates the country needs around 4,000 more nurses. Earlier this year, health minister Andrew Little said New Zealand needed hundreds of mental health nurses alone. The country only fully opened its borders in August, after more than two years of travel restrictions to combat COVID-19.

Ardern said that the message to nurses everywhere

now is that New Zealand is the 'best place to live, work and play'. "We need to be as competitive as we can be," she said, defending against allegations that her government had been slow to address shortfalls.

The change to the immigration settings drew criticism from the opposition, who said the move should have come sooner. "The government's major backdown on giving migrant nurses a direct pathway to residence should have happened a year ago," said National Party's immigration spokeswoman Erica Stanford.

"Leaving migrant nurses off the fast track to residence pathway was nothing short of madness while New Zealand faced critical staff shortages."

Ten additional professions were also added to the Green List on Monday, including roles across the healthcare, education and construction sectors to help boost the country's workforce.

AFP

Peru's president moves to bring elections forward

Lima, Peru - New Peruvian President Dina Boluarte announced on Sunday that she would seek to hold elections two years early, while also declaring a state of emergency in certain areas after protests following the arrest of her predecessor left two dead.

Demonstrators across the country - notably in northern and Andean towns - had been calling for fresh elections, along with a national strike and the release of leftist former president Pedro Castillo, who was removed from office on Wednesday for attempting to dissolve Congress and rule by decree.

"Interpreting the will of the citizens... I have decided to take the initiative to reach an agreement with the Congress of the Republic to advance general elections to the month of April of 2024," Boluarte said in a televised address, noting that a bill on moving the poll forward from 2026 would be submitted in the coming days.

She added that, 'with the same patriotic sentiment,' she was declaring a 'state of emergency in areas of high social con-



Supporters of former President Pedro Castillo clash with riot police during a demonstration in Lima, on Sunday (AFP)

flict in order to peacefully restore order.

Boluarte, a former prosecutor who had served as Castillo's vice president, was quickly sworn in to replace him following his impeachment and subsequent arrest last week.

On Saturday, she introduced her new cabinet, a group with an independent and technocratic profile and including eight women.

She named former prosecutor

Pedro Angulo as prime minister.

On Sunday demonstrators in cities across the country's interior - including Cajamarca, Arequipa, Huancayo, Cusco and Puno - demanded Castillo's release. New clashes broke out between protesters and police in the southern city of Andahuaylas, leaving two dead and at least five injured - including a police officer - as demonstrators attempted to storm the city's airport, authorities said.

Boluarte said that she would seek to hold elections two years early, while also declaring a state of emergency in certain areas

In her address, Boluarte expressed regret for the protesters' deaths.

'Remain calm'

Riot police were deployed to the airport to contain the thousands of demonstrators in Andahuaylas, which lies in Boluarte's home region of Apurimac.

Protesters fired slingshots and hurled stones, while police responded with tear gas, images from the scene broadcast by local TV showed. A police station in the Apurimac town of Huanabamba was set on fire, RPP radio reported.

"I urge people to remain calm," Interior Minister Cesar Cervantes told the station, as he

announced the second death shortly after police confirmed the first - a teenager.

Clashes in Andahuaylas on Saturday saw 16 civilians and four police officers injured.

"No Peruvian's life should be sacrificed for political interests," Boluarte tweeted on Sunday evening before her speech, reiterating a call for 'dialogue and the rejection of violence'.

The country's right-leaning Congress convened an emergency session on Sunday afternoon to discuss the crisis, but had to be suspended after physical altercations broke out.

In images posted on social media, a man can be seen punching another man from behind and then members shoving each other in the center of the chamber.

Some 1,000 to 2,000 people rallied in Lima on Sunday shouting, 'Castillo you are not alone, the people support you' and brandishing signs accusing 'Dina and Congress' of being 'corrupt rats,' before police dispersed the crowd with tear gas.

AFP

Protests: Iran defies global outcry with second execution

Paris, France - Iran on Monday executed a second man in connection with protests that have shaken the regime for almost three months, defying an international outcry over its use of capital punishment against those involved in the movement.

Majidreza Rahnavard, 23, had been sentenced to death by a court in the city of Mashhad for killing two members of the security forces with a knife, and wounding four other people, the judiciary's Mizan Online news agency reported.

It said he was hanged in public in the city, rather than inside prison.

Europe and the United States reacted with outrage after Iran on Thursday carried out the first execution linked to the protests. Mohsen Shekari, also 23, was hanged after his conviction for wounding a member of the security forces.

Iran calls the protests 'riots' and says they have been encouraged by its foreign foes.

Mizan published images of Rahnavard's execution, showing a man with his hands tied behind his back hanging from a rope attached to a crane. The execution took place before dawn and there was no sign of any significant number of people witnessing it. The director of Oslo-based group Iran Human Rights, Mahmood Amiry-Moghaddam, said Rahnavard 'was sentenced to death based on coerced confessions after a grossly unfair process and a show trial'.

"The public execution of a young protester, 23 days after his arrest, is another serious crime committed by the Islamic Republic's leaders and a significant escalation of the level of violence against protesters," he told AFP.

The weeks of protest were



A person checks a mobile phone on Monday, displaying a Tweet about the execution announced by Iranian authorities of Majidreza Rahnavard, the second capital punishment linked to nearly three months of protests (AFP)

The public execution of the young protester is another serious crime committed by the Islamic Republic's leaders and a significant escalation of violence against protesters

MAHMOOD AMIRY-MOGHADDAM

sparked by the death in custody of Mahsa Amini, 22, a Kurdish-Iranian arrested by the morality police for allegedly breaching the Islamic republic's strict dress code for women.

The protests represent the biggest challenge to the regime since the shah's ouster in 1979 and have been met with a crackdown that activists say aims to instil public fear.

New EU sanctions
EU ministers meeting in Brussels

were on Monday expected to impose fresh sanctions on Iran over the crackdown on the protesters and its supply of drones to Russia used in the war on Ukraine. EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said the bloc was going to 'approve a very, very tough package of sanctions'.

"These executions are a blatant attempt to intimidate people, not for committing crimes but just for taking their opinions to the streets, just for wanting to live in freedom," German Foreign

Minister Annalena Baerbock said.

US-based dissident Masih Alinejad charged that 'Majidreza Rahnavard's crime was protesting the murder of Mahsa Amini'.

"The regime's method of dealing with protests is execution," said Alinejad, adding: "EU, recall your ambassadors."

Prior to the two executions, Iran's judiciary said it had issued death sentences to 11 people in connection with the protests, but campaigners say around a dozen others face charges that could see them also receive the death penalty.

Reports ahead of the execution had described Rahnavard as a young fitness fanatic who was a keen amateur wrestler and had won competitions.

Rights groups including IHR

have said images have shown he was beaten in custody and forced into a purported confession broadcast on state media.

The protest monitor social media channel 1500tasvir said his family had been informed of the execution only after it was carried out.

It published pictures of a last meeting between the condemned man and his mother, saying she had left with no idea he was about to die.

'Risk of mass execution'

Iran's use of the death penalty is part of a crackdown that IHR says has seen the security forces kill at least 458 people.

According to the UN, at least 14,000 have been arrested.

Iran is already the world's most prolific user of the death penalty after China, Amnesty International says.

Public executions are however highly unusual in the Islamic republic, and one in July was described by IHR as the first in two years. Amnesty International Saturday warned that the lives of two more young men sentenced to death - Mahan Sadrat and Sahanand Nourmohammadzadeh - were both at imminent risk.

Amiry-Moghaddam warned of 'a serious risk of mass execution of protesters' and urged a strong international 'response that deters the Islamic Republic leaders from more executions'.

Before the second execution was announced, Oscar-winning Iranian film director Asghar Farhadi on his Instagram account urged the authorities to halt the executions. 'Killing and executing defenceless young people and the oppressed will only bring you more anger and more hate,' he said.

AFP



Taliban security forces arrive at the site of an attack at Shahr-e-naw which is city's one of main commercial areas in Kabul on Monday (AFP)

Three people killed in attack on China hotel in Kabul

Kabul, Afghanistan - At least three people were killed when gunmen attacked a hotel popular with Chinese business people in the Afghan capital on Monday, with witnesses reporting multiple blasts and several bursts of gunfire.

Smoke could be seen pouring from the multi-storey Kabul Longan Hotel as Taliban security forces rushed to the site and sealed off the neighbourhood.

The Taliban claim to have improved security since storming back to power in August last year but there have been scores of bomb blasts and attacks, many claimed by the local chapter of the Islamic State group.

Italian non-governmental organisation Emergency NGO, which operates a hospital just one kilometre from the blast site, said it had received 21 casualties, including three people dead on arrival. It did not say if those dead were civilians or involved in the attack.

A Kabul police spokesman said three attackers were killed and one suspect arrested, blaming the assault on 'mischievous elements'. "All the guests of the hotel have been rescued and no foreigner was killed. Only two foreign guests were injured when they threw themselves from an upper storey," chief Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid added on Twitter.

Video circulating on social

media showed people clamouring out of windows on the lower floors of the building, with the hotel sign - in English and Chinese - clearly visible.

Other video showed huge flames licking out of another section, with thick plumes of smoke.

A helicopter also made several passes of the area.

The hotel is popular with Chinese business visitors, who have flocked to Afghanistan since the Taliban's return in pursuit of high-risk but potentially lucrative business deals.

China, which shares a rugged 76km (47-mile) border with Afghanistan, has not officially recognised the Taliban government but is one of the few countries to maintain a full diplomatic presence there.

Beijing has long feared Afghanistan could become a staging point for minority Uyghur separatists in China's sensitive border region of Xinjiang.

The Taliban have promised that Afghanistan would not be used as a base for militants and, in exchange, China has offered economic support and investment for Afghanistan's reconstruction. Maintaining stability after decades of war in Afghanistan is Beijing's main consideration as it seeks to secure its borders and strategic infrastructure investments in neighbouring Pakistan.

AFP

Israeli raid: Palestinian girl found shot dead

Ramallah, Palestinian Territories
- A teenage Palestinian girl was found shot dead on the roof of her house after an Israeli raid in the occupied West bank, official Palestinian sources said on Monday. Israel's army said troops had exchanged fire with suspects in the area.

Without commenting specifically, the army said it was 'aware of reports regarding a killed Palestinian female' and the incident 'is under review'.

The Palestinian health ministry identified the girl as Jana Zakarna, who lived in Jenin, a city in the northern West Bank that is home to many fighters and has been targeted by near daily Israeli operations since March.

The official Palestinian news agency, Wafa, said Zakarna, 16, was 'shot in the head by Israeli soldiers while on the roof of her house'. It said relatives found her there after troops left the area.

In a statement, the army said it had entered Jenin overnight on Sunday-Monday 'to apprehend wanted individuals' and that three people were arrested.

"Suspects hurled explosives and fired heavily at the soldiers. The soldiers responded with live fire towards the armed suspects," the army said.

Three other Palestinians were wounded, according to the Palestinian Red Crescent.

AFP

Yemen war has killed or maimed over 11,000 children: United Nations

Dubai, UAE - More than 11,000 children are known to have been killed or maimed in Yemen's civil war since it escalated nearly eight years ago, the United Nations said on Monday.

"The true toll of this conflict is likely to be far higher," said the children's agency UNICEF about the casualties of the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

"Thousands of children have lost their lives, hundreds of thousands more remain at risk of death from preventable disease or starvation," said UNICEF executive director Catherine Russell. About 2.2mn Yemeni children are acutely malnourished, one quarter of them aged under five, and most are at extreme risk from cholera, measles and other vaccine-pre-

ventable diseases, UNICEF said.

Yemen's war broke out in 2014 and quickly saw Iran-backed Houthi rebels seize the capital Sanaa, prompting Saudi-led forces to intervene to prop up the government the following year.

Hundreds of thousands have died since, either as a result of fighting or indirectly through unsafe drinking water, disease out-

breaks, hunger and other impacts. The agency's latest numbers confirm 3,774 child deaths between March 2015 and September 2022.

A UN-brokered truce lasted for six months until October 2, but warring parties then failed to agree on an extension.

Since then at least 62 children have been killed or wounded, said UNICEF.

"The urgent renewal of the truce would be a positive first step that would allow critical humanitarian access," Russell said.

"Ultimately, only a sustained peace will allow families to rebuild their shattered lives and begin to plan for the future."

The UN agency also said 3,904 boys had been recruited into the fighting over the years,

and that more than 90 girls had been given roles including working at checkpoints.

UNICEF appealed for US\$484.4mn in funding to tackle the humanitarian crisis.

"If the children of Yemen are to have any chance of a decent future... all those with influence must ensure they are protected and supported," said Russell.

AFP

Three boys die after falling into frozen lake in UK: Police

London, UK - Three boys aged eight, 10 and 11 have died and another boy remains in critical condition after they fell into an icy lake near Birmingham, central England, police said on Monday.

"Three boys have tragically died after falling into the lake at Babbs Mill Park in Solihull yesterday afternoon," West Midlands Police said in a statement.

The boys suffered a cardiac arrest and were rushed to hospital after being pulled from the water.

"Sadly, they could not be revived and our thoughts are with their family and friends at this deeply devastating time," said police.

"A fourth boy, aged six, remains in a critical condition in hospital."

Witnesses reported seeing other children on the lake, which froze during a cold snap that has hit swathes of Britain, but police have not reported anyone else missing.

Emergency services were



A pedestrian walks along a snow-covered pavement in Brenchley, south east England, on Monday (AFP)

quickly on the scene, with fire and police officers wading into the frozen water in their uniforms, Solihull Superintendent Richard Harris said in a news conference.

One officer attempted to punch through the ice to get to the boys, he added.

Harris said the families were 'absolutely devastated' and the fact it occurred during the Christmas period 'adds to the tragedy'.

Identities of the victims will not be released until the families agree to do so, he added.

not be released until the families agree to do so, he added.

Snowy weather

The tragedy came as the UK was hit by heavy snow and freezing conditions, causing major travel

disruption, on the eve of a national rail strike on Tuesday that was already expected to bring the country to a grinding halt.

The UK has been experiencing a cold snap for several days, with temperatures dropping to -10 degrees Celsius (14 degrees Fahrenheit) in some areas, although the Met Office said the temperatures were 'not unusual for this time of year'.

The service has issued yellow alerts for snow, fog and frost in several areas, including south-east and southwest England, and the north of Scotland.

London Stansted airport warned of disruption.

"Our runway is temporarily closed whilst we undertake snow clearing," it said late on Sunday, with many flights cancelled early on Monday.

The airport later said that the runway was open and fully operational, but that travellers should still brace for delays.

The airport is a main hub of budget airline Ryanair, which

also cautioned about disruption to its flights at Gatwick, south of London.

"Due to ongoing severe snowy weather across the UK, runways at both Stansted and Gatwick have been temporarily closed tonight (11 December), disrupting all flights scheduled to depart Stansted/Gatwick during this temporary closure period," it said.

Dozens of stranded passengers posted videos on social media showing snow-covered runways and planes stuck on the ground.

More than 50 flights were also cancelled on Sunday at Heathrow, the UK's largest airport, due to freezing fog.

Train and bus services in London were also severely affected after the dump of around four inches (10cm) of snow overnight, which also forced the closure of parts of the M25 orbital road around the capital, the country's busiest motorway.

AFP

INDIA

SC to consider early listing of review plea in Bilkis Bano case

New Delhi, India - The Supreme Court on Monday said it will consider an early listing of a plea filed by victim seeking a review of its earlier order by which it had asked the Gujarat government to consider the plea for the remission of 11 convicts in Bilkis Bano gang rape case.

A bench of Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justices PS Narasimha and Dipankar Datta said: "It will come up by circulation. I will have it posted early. There is a date, I will check." The apex court said this after advocate Shobha Gupta told the bench that the review plea is yet to be listed and a tentative date was shown as December 5.

As per procedures, review pleas against top court judgements are decided in chambers by circulation by the judges who were part of the judgement under review.

She has filed a review plea against the May order of the Supreme Court which allowed the Gujarat government to apply the 1992 remission Rules.

Bano, besides filing a review petition, also filed a plea challenging the premature release of 11 convicts, who had gang raped her and murdered her family members during the 2002



This file photo shows Samajwadi Party supporters staging a protest against the remission of sentence granted to 11 convicts in Bilkis Bano case by Gujarat government, at Azad Maidan, in Mumbai on September 22 this year (ANI)

Godhra riots. The matter is listed for hearing on December 13 before a bench of Justices Ajay Rastogi and Bela Trivedi.

Bano said that even being the victim of the crime, she had no clue about any such process of remission or premature release initiated. Gujarat's remission order is a mechanical order of remission by completely ignoring the law required as consistently laid down, the plea said.

Earlier, some PILs were filed seeking directions to revoke the remission granted to 11 convicts.

The pleas were filed by the National Federation of Indian Women, whose General Secretary is Annie Raja, Member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) Subhashini Ali, journalist Revati Lall, social activist and professor Roop Rekha Verma and TMC MP Mahua Moitra. Gujarat government in

its affidavit had defended remission granted to convicts saying they completed 14 years of sentence in prison and their 'behaviour was found to be good'.

The State government said it has considered the cases of all 11 convicts as per the policy of 1992 and remission was granted on August 10, 2022, and the Central government also approved the pre-mature release of convicts.

It is pertinent to note that the remission was not granted under the circular governing grant of remission to prisoners as part of the celebration of 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav', it has said.

The affidavit has stated: "State government considered all the opinions and decided to release 11 prisoners since they have completed 14 years and above in prisons and their behaviour was found to be good."

The government had also questioned the locus standi of petitioners who filed the PIL challenging the decision saying they are outsiders to the case.

The pleas said they have challenged the order of competent authority of the government of Gujarat by way of which 11 persons who were accused in a set of heinous offences committed in Gujarat were allowed to walk free on August 15, 2022, pursuant to remission being extended to them.

The remission in this heinous case would be entirely against public interest and would shock the collective public conscience, as also be entirely against the interests of the victim, pleas stated.

ANI



Union Minister for External Affairs Subrahmanya Jaishankar (ANI)

Jaishankar hails India-UAE relations, calls it 'ambitious'

Abu Dhabi, UAE - In his address at India Global Forum in United Arab Emirates on Monday, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar called the relationship between India and UAE 'ambitious' and said the ties are not limited really by its bilateral possibilities and can be felt at the global level in future.

"It is in many ways a very ambitious relationship because it's not limited really by its bilateral possibilities. I'm very confident that as we get deeper into the relationship, it will also make itself felt at the global level," Jaishankar said. He hailed the ties between the two nations and reaffirmed that India and UAE have known each other for a long time and would want to

use this relationship today in a changing world. He also underscored the trade ties between India and UAE and added that UAE is today India's 3rd largest trade partner and is also India's 2nd largest export market.

"More Indian citizens live in UAE than in any other country abroad. So whether we are talking people, or whether we are talking business, UAE has particular salience in our perspectives," Jaishankar said.

Ranking the India-UAE relationship quite high, Jaishankar highlighted how the ties between both sides happen to have discussions on space, education, artificial intelligence, health and startups.

ANI

Mongolians brave temperatures below freezing in fight for justice

Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia - Bundled up in thick layers to battle temperatures below freezing, Mongolians are sleeping rough in the heart of their capital and say they will not leave until officials accused of corruption are punished.

Protests in the landlocked East Asian nation entered their eighth day on Monday, with thousands rallying in central Ulaanbaatar furious over claims a faction of lawmakers and executives stole

billions of dollars in coal.

Many have taken to spending the night in the central Genghis Khan Square, also known as Sukhbaatar Square, despite temperatures regularly dropping beneath minus 30 degrees Celsius (-22 degrees Fahrenheit).

Sporting sheepskin deel - a traditional long tunic-like garment - as well as wolfskin jackets and horseshin boots to keep warm, and sleeping on poly-



People gathering to protest against corruption in the coal industry and soaring inflation, at Sukhbaatar Square in Ulaanbaatar on Sunday (AFP)

styrene foam and felt, they are determined to stay for as long as it takes to get justice.

"I will stay here until the thieves receive punishment," a woman who had been sleeping in the square for four days told AFP.

She declined to be identified and said she feared for her safety after some protesters were beaten by police last week.

Demonstrators say they have been emboldened by public sup-

port, with residents sharing provisions and words of encouragement. Celebrities and social media influencers have even joined calls for action.

"So many people care about us. Ordinary people keep bringing hot food and drinks and donating warm clothes," 22-year-old protester Ariunzaya Tsengelsaikhan told AFP.

"It's warm if you sleep between two people and stick with

each other and we change positions every two hours to make sure everybody is warm," she said.

"Two days ago, after I gave an interview for public television, a man gave me a sleeping bag and a mat."

Authorities have refused to allow protesters to erect traditional Mongolian tents - in the north of the square.

AFP

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BRAINY FOODS



Food plays an important role in keeping our brain healthy. There are certain foods that are known to improve specific mental tasks, such as memory, attention span and concentration. These foods are termed as 'Brainy Foods'.

Brainy foods contain brain building compounds like antioxidants, healthy fats like Omega 3, choline, phospholipids along with healthy carbohydrates and proteins. All these vital, brainy nutrients are not found in one food, hence, we need to eat a variety of foods to get all brain boosting elements.

The question that comes to mind is, how does food influence brain function?

FOOD AND BRAIN

To understand the connection between food and brain, it's important to first understand the brain function. Our brain is essentially a network of billions of nerve cells called neurons. The connections made between these neurons dramatically increase during childhood years. It is these connections which are vital to memory, cognition and learning, as they help in transferring messages within the brain and from the brain to other parts of the body.

Now comes the interesting fact, that the sending and receiving station of these messages - called receptors - are made of healthy fats found in fish, seeds, eggs, organ meat, and amino acid - the raw material of proteins.

The message itself, called neurotransmitter, in most cases is made up of these amino acids. Furthermore, for the making of these messages the brain needs, vitamins and minerals. The nerve cells get powered by glucose or healthy carbohydrates.

TIPS AND CAUTIONS

- Breakfast is the first meal of the day. Eating a healthy breakfast is like charging your body and brain with power to work and function. Skipping this meal can affect our mood and cognitive functioning.
- Make sure every meal has at least one brainy food, e.g. adding eggs to your breakfast gives you a brainy start to your day.
- Eating excess of any food, be it a healthy or brainy food, will not give better results but can cause other concerns, like excess intake of calorie or proteins which, in turn, can have some negative effects on the body.
- Depending on supplements to meet your daily nutritional needs or to get these brainy nutrients is not advisable. Go for fresh foods that nature has provided.
- Following a healthy diet plan, which includes fruits, veggies with emphasis on coloured veggies, lentils, beans, nuts, seeds, eggs, and whole grains is the best way of keeping the brain healthy.
- The best brain-friendly foods are also heart-friendly, keeps your weight in check, plus boosts immunity. Hence, including these in your daily meals gives you multiple benefits.

To conclude, the basic structure of our brain is laid down at birth, but what we eat from early years of our life, helps develop the brain structure, and through it comes intelligence, ability to learn, grasp, cognise, remember, etc. We can't change our genes but we can definitely use the right kind of foods to promote healthy functioning of our brain.

(More on foods for the brain next week)

(Vandana Chawla is an Online Nutrition Expert and a Registered Nutritionist-UKVRN)



IMPORTANCE OF EXERCISE FOR STUDENTS

Loaded with school stress, assignments that eat into leisure hours, and the constant anxiety of getting ahead in the education rat race, students these days cut down on playtime and physical activity, though these are very important for their growth and development



BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

According to an article in ActiveHealth, exercise could help to improve brain development which can boost cognitive abilities. One study found that 12 weeks of aerobic exercise at moderate to high-intensity levels seems to have a positive effect on levels of Brain-Derived Neurotrophic Factor (BDNF). BDNF is a protein that promotes the growth of nerve cells, and thus plays a crucial role in brain development. It was conducted in adolescents, whose brains are still developing, demonstrating the potential benefit of exercise for students.

Dr John Ratey, an Associate Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, explains that exercise improves learning in three ways - Enhancing your mindset to improve alertness, attention, and motivation; Preparing and stimulating nerve cells to bind to one another, which is the foundation for transfer and development of new information; and Promoting the growth of new nerve cells. Essentially, exercise prepares the brain for learning and makes retaining information easier.

STRESS-COPING MECHANISM

It is important to note that not all stress is bad. There is positive stress, otherwise known as eustress that is associated with improved performance and productivity. Distress is negative stress that is associated with performance decline and negative health consequences such as obesity, diabetes, and depression.

Although the exact physiological mechanisms to explain how exercise improves 'distress' has not been determined, there is some evidence suggesting that being physically active improves the way the body handles stress through changes in hormone responses and affects neurotransmitters that affect mood and behaviours.

A study among college-aged girls showed that those who were allowed to take an exercise break (20 minutes of low-intensity cycling) from studying were calmer and this may due to the 'time out' hypothesis - a breather from daily stressors and worries.

BETTER SLEEP

Aerobic exercise leads to a better quality of sleep, which is crucial to a student's academic performance. Sleep helps in retaining more information from studying as it is moved from short term to long term during rapid eye movement sleep (REM).

Inadequate sleep leads to decreased alertness and attention, which could result in students missing out on important information in class. Higher brain functions, such as language, logical reasoning, and creativity are impaired as well, affecting a student's ability during a test or exam, or while doing an assignment.

Adequate sleep contributes to a student's overall health and well-being. Students should get the proper amount of sleep at night to help stay focused, improve concentration, and improve academic performance. Children and adolescents who do not get enough sleep have a higher risk for many health problems, including obesity, type 2 diabetes, poor mental health, and attention and behaviour problems.

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HOT YOGA

HEAT AND SWEAT

'H'ot yoga' is a term that can be used to describe just about any style of yoga practice performed in a warm or humid room.

When a class is called 'hot yoga' you could be holding poses for a minute or moving quickly from pose to pose, but two things are nearly always constant - heat and sweat.

"Hot yoga, in the simplest terms, is yoga performed in a heated room," says Samantha Scupp, the founder and a teacher at Heatwise, a New York City hot yoga studio, who is certified by Yoga Alliance, the world's largest nonprofit yoga association that certifies teachers and schools.

Hot yoga classes vary in length but typically last 60 to 120 minutes. Participants can sweat out up to three or four pounds

of water in just one class, most of which will be replaced once the person is fully hydrated.

Hot yoga classes often include postures and breathing techniques from other traditional yoga, but the practice of intentionally heating the room higher than normal, just for yoga, is a somewhat newer concept.

Bikram yoga, founded in the 1970s by Bikram Choudhury, is generally recognised as the first style of hot yoga. Bikram yoga classes all include a very specific sequence of 26 yoga poses and two breathing exercises performed in the same order, within 90 minutes, in a room heated to over 100 degrees Fahrenheit. It is, probably, the most well-known style of hot yoga, but there are several other styles.



BENEFITS

Hot yoga, like other types of yoga, can be great for stress relief or stress management, says Scupp. "It's a moving meditation."

The hot room can help increase flexibility, says Scupp — which can feel great for people who do other types of intense workouts in which their muscles get really tight. "We get a lot of men in here who say, 'I don't do yoga, I'm not flexible.' But then they go into the hot room and their muscles really loosen up. They're able to achieve all kinds of stretches that they've never been able to do before,"

As with any physical activity, the more you move in yoga, the more calories you burn. Although many people associate sweating with calorie burning and weight loss, that's not the case. Sweating is your body's method of cooling itself and not a measure of how much weight you'll keep off.



Hot yoga is definitely a form of movement and exercise — and it can be very helpful for people trying to improve their fitness or lose weight, Scupp says. But it typically delivers more benefits in terms of relaxation, stress relief, and muscle recovery rather than calorie burning.

WHAT TO WEAR

Clothes that are good for lots of sweat, such as moisture-wicking material or spandex, work well for hot yoga. A lot of men go shirtless and a lot of women just wear sports bras and leggings or shorts.

WHAT TO EAT/DRINK

Avoid eating a big meal in the few hours before class, and avoid snacking in the hour before class. Try to plan your eating and snacking so that you've fueled your body appropriately, so you don't come in starving, or with a full stomach either, she says. Drink plenty of fluids in the hours leading up to class and carry a bottle of water along.

WHAT TO CARRY

Many studios provide mats, but because of the amount of sweating, some people prefer to bring their own. It's a good idea to bring a towel and a water bottle.

Cholesterol and your heart



DR R GANESAN
Consultant - Interventional Cardiology
Badr Al Samaa Hospital, Ruwi

Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance in your cells. Our bodies generally make all the cholesterol needed for good health. Cholesterol helps make hormones, vitamin D, and substances to help you digest foods.

Small packages, called lipoproteins, carry cholesterol through your bloodstream. Two kinds of lipoproteins carry the cholesterol. You may have heard about 'good' and 'bad' cholesterol. High-density lipoprotein (HDL) is the 'good' cholesterol. Low-density lipoprotein (LDL) is the 'bad' cholesterol.

HDL helps your body get rid of cholesterol so it doesn't clog your arteries. High levels of HDL may lower your risk of a heart attack, stroke, and other health problems. LDL deposits cholesterol inside the blood vessels that carry blood to your heart and other parts of your body. Over time, this may cause your arteries to narrow or get blocked, which can cause a heart attack, stroke, or other health problems.

Triglycerides are a type of fat in your blood that your body uses for energy. A combination of high triglyceride and low HDL levels can increase your risk for heart attack and stroke. That's why it's important to take steps to get and keep your cholesterol in a healthy range.

Are you at risk?

The following factors increase your likelihood of having unhealthy cholesterol levels:

- Your lifestyle, including diet, smoking, stress, alcohol consumption, and physical inactivity
- A family history of high cholesterol
- Your race or ethnicity may affect your risks
- Normal age-related changes in the body may increase LDL.
- Men are more likely than women to have unhealthy cholesterol levels
- Obesity can also raise your LDL and lower your HDL levels.

Getting a cholesterol test

You can get a blood test to measure your cholesterol levels. Many screening sites measure only total cholesterol. It's important to look at all types of cholesterol in your blood and not just your total cholesterol number.

How is high cholesterol treated?

The main goal in treating high cholesterol is to lower your LDL or 'bad' cholesterol levels. Studies prove that lowering LDL can slow, stop, or even reverse the buildup of plaque, which is a deposit of cholesterol and other substances in your arteries.

Live a heart-healthy lifestyle

Key to having healthy cholesterol levels is a healthy lifestyle. Begin making the following changes in your daily life:

Eat heart-healthy

What you eat greatly affects your cholesterol levels. Adopting a heart-healthy eating plan can help keep levels in a healthy range. Eating whole grains, fruits, and vegetables rather than refined carbohydrates such as sugar are beneficial. Also, limit intake of saturated fats found in fatty cuts of meat, dairy products, coconut oil, palm kernel oil, and palm oil.

Be active, manage stress

Physical activity can help lower LDL and triglycerides levels and raise HDL levels. About 2½ hours of weekly physical activity is recommended for adults. Also, research has shown that chronic stress can sometimes increase LDL levels and decrease HDL levels, so managing stress is important.

Lifestyle changes

Quit smoking, get enough sleep which helps repair your heart and blood vessels, and limit alcohol consumption.

If you have high cholesterol and are overweight or obese, you may improve your health by aiming for a healthy weight.

If you make healthy lifestyle changes and your cholesterol levels are still high, your healthcare provider may prescribe medicines to help lower your LDL level.

Even if you take cholesterol medicine, keep up your healthy lifestyle changes.



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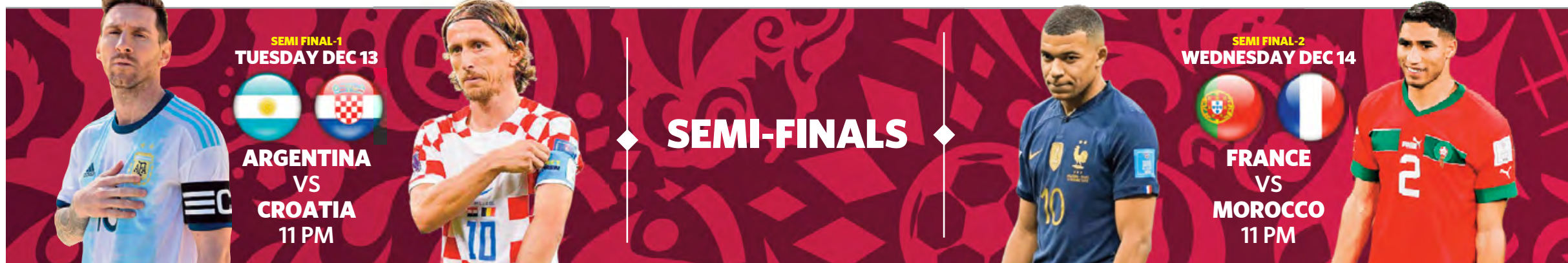


FIFA WORLD CUP

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TUESDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2022 | MUSCAT DAILY | 13



BEAUTIFUL DAY, FINALLY

Morocco goalkeeper Yassine Bounou, who has been in dazzling form, takes long road to stardom

Doha, Qatar - Yassine Bounou has learned to be patient in his career, but the Morocco goalkeeper with a show-stopping nickname is proving he more than belongs on the big stage at this World Cup.

An unused squad member at the 2017 Africa Cup of Nations and the 2018 World Cup in Russia, Bounou - or 'Bono' as the name on his shirt reads - has played a fundamental part in helping Morocco set a new benchmark for African football in Qatar.

With 14 foreign-born players in the squad, it has been a case of unity in diversity for Morocco - there is no better example of that solidarity than a defence which has conceded just once in five matches here.

Bounou kept 2018 runners-up Croatia at bay in their tournament opener. He suddenly disappeared just before kick-off in a 2-0 win over Belgium, having lined up with the team for the national anthems.

Replaced by Munir El Kajoui, coach Walid Regragui later cleared up the mystery by explaining Bounou had felt unwell after sustaining a knock against Croatia.

The 31-year-old Bounou hasn't put a foot wrong since his return



Morocco's goalkeeper Yassine Bounou plays with his son Isaac as he celebrates their win against Portugal on Saturday

against Canada, the country of his birth. Despite Nayef Aguerd's own goal, a 2-1 victory sent Morocco through as the surprising Group F winners.

Remarkably, no opposing player has scored against Morocco at this World Cup - and that remains true despite the North Africans needing penalties to see off Spain in the last 16.

After Pablo Sarabia smacked the post with Spain's first kick, Bounou saved from Carlos Soler and Sergio Busquets as Morocco won 3-0 in the shootout to reach the quarter-finals for the very first time.

He was again man of the match in a 1-0 victory over Portugal, ending Cristiano Ronaldo's World Cup dreams by denying the five-time Ballon d'Or winner in stoppage time.

"These kinds of moments are difficult to believe," said Bounou, "but we've come to change the mentality, our insecurity. Moroccan players can compete against anyone in the world."

"I think the most important thing, except the semi-final and that, is that we've changed that mentality and the generation after us will know that Moroccan players

can do all this."

Long route to top

Bounou's success is a prime example of persistence paying off.

Born in Montreal, Bounou and his family returned to Morocco when he was seven. He joined the Wydad Casablanca academy and broke into the first team aged 19, appearing in the 2011 CAF Champions League final.

He signed for Atletico Madrid the following year, spending two seasons with the reserves, before moving on loan to Real Zaragoza in the second division.

With opportunities limited at Atletico, he left the club permanently for Girona in 2016 and helped them immediately win promotion to the Spanish top flight.

Herve Renard selected Munir as his first-choice 'keeper at the 2018 World Cup, a campaign which ended in the group stage, but Bounou has since made the number one shirt his own.

After Girona's relegation, Bounou joined Sevilla on loan for the 2019-20 season and starred as the Spanish club won a record-extending sixth Europa League title.

AFP

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Ronaldo won't make any 'heat of moment' decision after sad exit

Lisbon, Portugal - Cristiano Ronaldo said on Sunday "there's no point in reacting in the heat of the moment," as he responded to Portugal's World Cup elimination.

Ronaldo stayed in Qatar as many of the Portugal squad returned home and landed in Lisbon on Sunday afternoon.

"To win a World Cup for Portugal was the biggest and most ambitious dream of my career. Fortunately, I won many titles of international dimension, including for Portugal," Ronaldo wrote on Instagram.

His post did not talk about international retirement but he started Portugal's last two matches in



Qatar on the bench, a decision which provoked debate in Portugal and across the football world.

"Let's hope that time will be a good counsellor and allow everyone to draw their own conclusions," he wrote.

The Instagram post was accompanied by a photo showing Ronaldo, head down, trudging off the field in Doha after the 1-0 quarter-final loss to Morocco on Saturday. At 37, Ronaldo was playing his fifth World Cup.

Ronaldo is without a club after a bitter divorce with Manchester United.

According to the Portuguese press, Ronaldo threatened to leave the squad after he was dropped from the starting lineup, but that was denied by coach Fernando Santos.

France will not underestimate Morocco threat, says Varane

Doha, Qatar - France defender Raphael Varane has insisted that there will be no complacency from the World Cup holders when they take on surprise package Morocco in the semi-finals on Wednesday.

Having edged out England in the last eight, Les Bleus are strong favourites to return to the final even though Morocco have already eliminated Spain and Portugal in the knockout phase in Qatar.

"We have enough experience in the team to not fall into that trap," said Varane, one of the survivors of France's victorious 2018 World Cup campaign, when asked about the danger of over-confidence.

"We know Morocco are not here by chance. It is up to us experienced players to make sure everyone is prepared for another battle."

France have reached the target set by the country's football federation of getting to the last four



We know Morocco are not here by chance. It is up to us experienced players to make sure everyone is prepared for another battle

but Manchester United defender Varane said the team were hungry for a place in Sunday's final against Argentina or Croatia.

"It is not easy to get to a World Cup semi-final so we are very

pleased, but the only real objective is to win it," he said. "That was always the aim."

Fellow defender Jules Kounde was full of praise for a Morocco team that have made history - the

first African side to reach a World Cup semi-final and the first Arab team to do so.

Walid Regragui's men beat Portugal 1-0 in the quarter-finals after dumping out Spain on penalties in the last 16.

They also beat Belgium and drew with Croatia during the group phase and have conceded just a single goal, from an own goal, in their five matches so far.

"They are very compact, with lines that are close together, and they leave little time for the player on the ball to organise himself," said Barcelona right-back Kounde.

"They also run really fast, so we'll need to play with few touches, move the ball around quickly and try to unbalance them by moving from one side to the other."

"It is remarkable to have only conceded one goal at this stage of the competition, all the more so given the teams they have faced."

AFP

FIFA WORLD CUP

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CLASH OF MAES



Luka Modric

Luka Modric and Croatia stand between Lionel Messi and World Cup final

Doha, Qatar - Lionel Messi and Argentina's World Cup dream remains alive but an indefatigable Croatia side inspired by the enduring brilliance of Luka Modric stands in their way in Tuesday's semi-final in Doha.

Argentina have recovered from the shock of losing their opening game in Qatar to Saudi Arabia and made the last four with an exhausting win on penalties against the Netherlands at the end of a fractious quarter-final on Friday.

Having been 2-0 up and cruising after 83 minutes, with Messi setting up one goal in sublime fashion and netting a penalty, they conceded twice late on and had to survive extra time before triumphing 4-3 in a shoot-out.

Backed by an enormous contingent of travelling supporters who have brought the passion, noise and colour of Argentina's own stadiums to this World Cup, Messi and his teammates are starting to believe this really could be their year.

"We have balls, passion, heart and we are doing this for 45 million people," said goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez, and Argentina's optimism now has only increased after seeing great rivals Brazil go out in the last round.

Now aged 35, this has been billed as Messi's last chance to win a World Cup, eight years on from Argentina's defeat in the final to Germany in Rio de Janeiro.

He is determined to seize the chance and has already scored his first two goals in the knockout rounds of any World Cup, netting against Aus-

tralia in the last 16 before his penalty against the Dutch.

World Cup glory would complete a wonderful career for the seven-time Ballon d'Or winner, who is possibly the greatest club player ever.

After years of being unfulfilled at international level he inspired Argentina to victory at last year's Copa America, but he knows there are no more dogged or durable opponents than Croatia.

After all, any sense of relief at avoiding having to play Brazil in the last four will be tempered by the prospect of facing a Croatian side who knocked out the favourites on penalties and never know when they are beaten.

"They are a great team who matched up to Brazil and at times were much better," admitted Messi.

"They have good players across the whole midfield and they have been working with the same coach since the last World Cup, so they all know each other very well."

'Safer than money in the bank'

Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni switched to a five-man defence against the Netherlands as he brought Lisandro Martinez into his line-up.

But the midfield is always key against Croatia, with Modric still controlling games at 37 and Marcelo Brozovic and Mateo Kovacic completing a formidable trio.

After reaching the final four years ago, Croatia have beaten Japan and

Brazil on penalties to make the semis here.

They have gone to extra time in eight of their last nine major tournament knockout matches and the nation of just four million people has nothing to lose as they eye a place in the final against France or Morocco.

And in Modric they have a master, the 2018 Ballon d'Or winner who starred as Croatia beat Argentina 3-0 in the group stage four years ago.

"I think Mateo, Luka and Marcelo are the best midfield in history. When you pass them the ball, it is safer than having your money in the bank," said Josip Juranovic, another standout at right-back.

"We are so lucky to have them in the team."

Modric's history with Argentina goes back to 2006, when he made his international debut for Croatia aged 20 in a friendly between the teams.

Messi scored in that game but Croatia won 3-2. Zlatko Dalic's team will not be afraid of Argentina or their number 10 when the sides meet again at Lusail Stadium.

Asked about how they would handle Messi, Croatia forward Bruno Petkovic responded: "We don't have a specific plan, at least not yet, for stopping Messi and usually we don't concentrate on one player, but Argentina is not only Messi."

Two players who will not feature for Argentina, however, are defenders Gonzalo Montiel and Marcos Acuna, both of whom are suspended.

AFP

Argentina coach Scaloni defends players after stormy clash

Doha, Qatar - Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni defended his players from accusations of misconduct in their fractious World Cup quarter-final against the Netherlands, insisting on Monday that the game was played in the "right way".

The South American team have recovered from a shock defeat at the hands of Saudi Arabia in their opening group game in Qatar to reach the last four.

But the two-time champions were heavily criticised following their bad-tempered last-eight clash with the Netherlands last week.

Scaloni's side threw away a two-goal lead against the Dutch at Lusail Stadium but eventually triumphed 4-3 in a penalty shoot-out.

However, the game featured a record 18 yellow cards and multiple mass confrontations, and FIFA has since opened disciplinary proceedings against both sides.

Argentina will be without Gonzalo Montiel and Marcos Acuna due to suspension.



Argentina supporters display a banner depicting the images of Lionel Messi and Diego Maradona

ARGENTINA REVEL IN 'HOME' SUPPORT AT WORLD CUP

Doha, Qatar - Lionel Messi and Argentina's bid for a third World Cup crown is being boosted by hordes of travelling fans that have transformed each of their matches in Qatar into virtual home games.

Argentine football venues are renowned for their seething intensity - iconic Buenos Aires cauldrons such as the Bombonera or Monumental tremble with passionate ferocity.

Those kinds of scenes have been recreated regularly at Doha's Lusail Stadium.

Argentina have already played three

games at the glittering 88,966-seat arena, where Messi and his teammates will battle Croatia on Tuesday, aiming to book a place in the World Cup final.

After most Argentina games, the 'Albiceleste' have lingered on the pitch long after the final whistle, sharing a moment of emotionally charged communion with their supporters.

"We like to take advantage of these moments with the people who are here and in Argentina, where everyone is euphoric," Messi said following Friday's quarter-final win over the Netherlands.

According to the Argentine em-

bassy in Qatar, between 35,000 and 40,000 fans have travelled to the World Cup to support the team, one of the largest contingents of overseas supporters at the tournament.

That sizeable support has been augmented by thousands of Qatar-based migrant workers from India and Bangladesh, where Messi and Argentina enjoy widespread support.

"Compared to France, Argentina aren't quite at the same level as a team - but they are a team who are benefiting from the support they have here," the Argentina-born former France striker David Trezeguet said.

MOMENT IN TIME



BALD MOVE: FIFA President Gianni Infantino shows the yellow card to former Italian Al Thumama Stadium in Doha on Monday (AFP)

5

Argentina have played in the semi-finals of World Cup five times and they have never lost in the last-four stage

8

Eight of Croatia's last nine knockout games at major tournaments have gone to extra-time, with the 4-2 loss to France in the 2018 final the only exception.



STROS



Lionel Messi



Former Italian footballer Alessandro Del Piero as he officiates a friendly match of FIFA Legends and Qatar-based workers at

THE KEY FACTORS

Doha, Qatar - Croatia and Argentina face each other on Tuesday at the Lusail Stadium with a place in the World Cup final at stake. Here is a look at some of the keys to the game.

MESSI OR MODRIC MAGIC?

The late-career evolution of Lionel Messi into a clever creator operating behind the front line has intensified at this World Cup.

He illustrated just how effective he can be with his superb defence-splitting pass to set up the opening goal in the quarter-final against the Netherlands.

Croatia are unlikely to put a specific man-marker on Messi, relying on what has been a solid defence and one of the best midfields in the tournament to gain the upper hand.

Marcelo Brozovic occupies the deepest defensive role in the Croat midfield trio and is likely to have the most work to do in nullifying Messi, 35, but Mateo Kovacic put in a strong defensive shift against Brazil and is likely to be asked for a repeat performance.

With the ball, Croatia have their own diminutive veteran maestro in 37-year-old Luka Modric, whose ability to dictate the tempo, maintain possession and take his team forward into dangerous areas is fundamental for his country's hopes of reaching successive World Cup finals.

CROAT RESILIENCE OR TIREDNESS?

Just as four years ago in Russia, where Croatia won every knockout round game after extra-time - twice on penalties - before the final, Zlatko Dalic's team have shown a remarkable ability to grind out results beyond the 90 minutes.

Croatia conceded the first goal against both Japan and Brazil but came back to force the game into penalties and win.

Will that impressive mental strength prove to be decisive again or will those extended battles take a toll physically?

It will help Croatia that Argentina also had to go to penalties in their emotionally draining quarter-final win over the Netherlands and a crucial factor on Tuesday will be which team finds themselves fresher for the task.

ARGENTINA'S 12TH MAN

If there is one area in which Argentina can count on a clear advantage it is in the stands, where more than 40,000 Argentine supporters backed their team at the Lusail Stadium against the Dutch.

The atmosphere was such that the last-eight clash was turned into a de facto home game for Argentina, with only a smattering of fans in orange in the stadium, which has a capacity of nearly 89,000.

It will almost certainly be the same story, at the same stadium, on Tuesday, with Croatia's much smaller group of followers drowned out by the songs and chants of the Argentine faithful.

Will that impact the game? Almost certainly. Plenty of studies have shown that playing in front of a supportive crowd does impact performance in a positive way.

A STRIKING CHANCE?

With Messi in a deeper role, Argentina find themselves in the unusual position of not having an established world-class forward and that is also the case for Croatia.

Dalic started the semi-final against Brazil with Andrej Kramaric at centre-forward before Bruno Petkovic replaced him and went on to score the crucial equaliser.

Against the Dutch, Argentina started Manchester City's Julian Alvarez as their main striker with Inter Milan's Lautaro Martinez coming on for him and causing plenty of trouble in extra-time.

It will be interesting to see if either of those subs are given a start in the semi-final or whether they will again be asked to make an impact from the bench.



We try to give it all on the pitch. Sometimes luck can be on your side. If we have a good performance, we'll have an easier road to reach our objective. But this is football, so sometimes the best team may not win.

LIONEL SCALON
ARGENTINA COACH



I am an optimist by nature, I do trust my players, they have demonstrated a high-level of quality, strength of character as we would not have made it to the semi-finals without that. We will not change the way we play.

ZLATKO DALIC
CROATIA COACH



Croatia's Bruno Petkovic celebrates scoring against Brazil on Friday (AFP)

Croatia's mental strength has deep roots: Quarter-final hero Petkovic

Doha, Qatar - Croatia striker Bruno Petkovic says the team's mental strength that has propelled them to two penalty shoot-out wins at the World Cup has deep roots in the country's struggle for independence.

Petkovic scored a late equaliser to cancel out Neymar's opener for Brazil in the quarter-finals, before Zlatko Dalic's team held their nerve to win on spot kicks. They also beat Japan on penalties in the previous round.

It is a familiar pattern for Dalic's men, who four years ago reached the final via three extra-time wins in the knockout stage, two of them after shoot-outs.

"I think one of the reasons (for this mentality), is that we are a small country," Petkovic said on Sunday. "Even though as players we are young, we know how our country was made and gained independence in the 1990s."

"We learned about this from our parents. We learned you fight, you

work hard and you don't get anywhere without that," added the 28-year-old, who has become a national hero since his equaliser broke Brazilian hearts.

Some of the older players in the team have strong connections to the conflict in the Balkans in the 1990s.

Veteran midfielder Luka Modric was displaced as a youngster and defender Dejan Lovren was forced out of his childhood home.

Croatia featured in their first World Cup as an independent nation in 1998 and reached the semi-final, where they lost to hosts and eventual winners France.

France also ended Croatian dreams four years ago in Russia, winning the final 4-2, but the country of four million people has its team back in the last four again and looking full of belief.

"I think we have improved with each game, as the opponents got stronger, we got better and better," said Petkovic.

Chasing the dream: New ball 'Al Hilm' for semis and final

Doha, Qatar - Al Hilm was unveiled on Sunday by adidas as the official match ball for the semi-finals and final of the World Cup in Qatar. Al Hilm, which translates as 'The Dream' in Arabic, follows on from the Official Match Ball of the group stages, Al Rihla, or 'The Journey'.

Utilising the latest technological advances in ball design, Al Hilm includes the same unprecedented adidas 'Connected Ball' technology as Al Rihla, which has proven invaluable in helping match officials making faster and more accurate decisions during this World Cup.

Combined with player position data, the innovation offers Video Match Officials instant data, to help optimize decision making for a seamless fan experience. By combining the ball data captured by IMU

sensors within the ball and applying artificial intelligence, the new technology supports the semi-automated offside system, especially by providing the exact moment the ball is played in tight offside situations.

Johannes Holzmüller, Director of Football Technology & Innovation at FIFA, said: "With the development of the connected ball technology, adidas made it possible that an additional important layer of information is available to the match officials. The data from the ball unlocks new insights for storytelling around the unique moments on the pitch at this World Cup."

The ball was also designed with the environment at its heart - all components have been considered, and Al Hilm is the first World Cup semi-finals and final ball made using only water-based inks and glues.



WOODCRAFT LEAVES PAKISTAN POLEAXED

Rampant Mark Wood takes four wickets to inspire England to victory in second Test and series

Multan, Pakistan - Mark Wood grabbed four Pakistan wickets to give England a hard-fought 26-run win Monday in the second Test in Multan and take an unsailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

The fast bowler finished with 4-65 as Pakistan were dismissed for 328 about 50 minutes after lunch on day four, having been set a challenging 355-run target.

Wood, who missed England's 74-run win in the first Test in Rawalpindi with a hip injury, turned the match in England's favour with the wickets of Mohammad Nawaz (45) and Saud Shakeel (94) in the space of 12 balls and one run.

Pakistan slumped to 291-7 at lunch, and after the break Agha Salman (20 not out) and Abrar Ahmed (17) tried to hit out for an unlikely win to keep the series alive.

But James Anderson had

Ahmed caught, Wood dismissed Zahid Mahmood without scoring and Ollie Robinson ended the match with the wicket of number eleven Mohammad Ali for zero, sparking celebrations in the England camp.

Anderson and Robinson took two wickets apiece.

The win gives England their eighth win in the nine Tests since Brendon McCullum took over as head coach and Ben Stokes as captain in May this year.

Those victories have been built around "Bazball", a term coined from McCullum's nickname, and describing the aggressive free-wheeling approach the New Zealander has instilled in the side since taking over.

England are now world champions in the 50-over and T20 versions of the game and rapidly ascending the Test rankings ladder.

This becomes England's third



England's Mark Wood (2R) celebrates after taking the wicket of Pakistan's Zahid Mahmood during the fourth day of the second Test in Multan on Monday (AFP)

series win in Pakistan after victories 1961 and 2000 - although they haven't toured in 17 years because of security issues.

"It was pleasing the way we stuck at the task of going out and putting them under pressure even if conditions aren't in our favour," said Stokes afterwards.

"Jimmy, Robbo and Woody put in a seriously good effort, so

hats off to the lads. The way they bowled throughout the game, they looked a huge threat."

'We made mistakes'

Shakeel, who hit eight boundaries in his 314-minute vigil, added 80 runs with Nawaz as England found wickets hard to come by on a Multan pitch that slowed considerably as the game

progressed.

In a last-ditch effort, Stokes brought in Wood before lunch and was instantly rewarded with Nawaz caught by wicketkeeper Ollie Pope. In his next over Wood forced Shakeel to play a pull shot off a short ball that caught his glove, with Pope taking a diving catch to his left.

Replays were inconclusive as

to whether the ball scraped the ground before Pope caught it, but, controversially, the third umpire deemed there was not enough evidence to overturn the decision.

Pakistan skipper Babar Azam accepted it as part of the game.

"As professionals we need to respect and follow the umpire's decision," he said.

"We made mistakes as a team," said Azam after Pakistan lost their last six wickets for 37 in the first innings and last five for 38 in the second.

Resuming on 198-4, Pakistan had lost Faheem Ashraf in the sixth over of the day for 10, caught at slip for spinner Joe Root's 50th wicket.

AFP



David Popovici

Swim sensation Popovici among star cast for world championships

Melbourne, Australia - Swimming's new teenage sensation David Popovici insists he will be an underdog at the World Short Course Championships in Australia this week, saying he's still looking to gain experience.

The 18-year-old Romanian is the sport's hottest young prospect and a headline draw at the event in Melbourne from Tuesday.

His star has rapidly risen after a phenomenal year that saw him smash the long course 100m freestyle world record, touching in 46.86 seconds at the European Championships in August.

It sliced 0.05sec off the old mark held by Brazilian Cesar Cielo since 2009, set in the era of buoyant body suits.

The heroics came after Popovici became the first man to complete the 100m/200m freestyle double at the World

Championships in nearly 50 years, burgeoning his reputation as early gold medal favourite for the Paris 2024 Olympics.

But short course swimming, held in a 25-metre pool instead of the usual 50, with more emphasis on the turns, is not something he's accustomed to.

"I don't think it's a bluff to say that I don't like swimming short course events, I am sort of built for long course competition," he said on the eve of the championships.

"The turns and starts are more intense in short course, so this is a great opportunity to gather information and to gain experience and to be the best version that I can be."

Popovici's showdown over 100m with Australian world record holder Kyle Chalmers is set to be a highlight.

AFP

Australia pacer Hazlewood out of first South Africa Test

Adelaide, Australia - Injured pace spearhead Josh Hazlewood on Monday was ruled out of Australia's opening Test against South Africa in Brisbane this week, but skipper Pat Cummins "appears likely" to play.

Hazlewood, who has a side strain and missed the just-completed second Test against the West Indies in Adelaide, was the only omission in a 14-man squad.

But Cummins is set to return after also sitting out the 419-run win in Adelaide with a thigh problem.

That means either Scott Boland or Michael Neser will miss out despite both impressing in their returns to the Test arena against the Caribbean side.

Uncapped speedster Lance Morris remains in the 14-man squad as a wildcard option.

"Pat continues to improve, bowled with freedom on Saturday and appears likely to play this match, although Josh will need more time," said chief selector George Bailey.

"With that in mind, we have retained Michael Neser and Lance Morris in the squad for this match.

"Michael bowled superbly in Adelaide, as did Scott," he added.

"We were impressed as always with their performances that backed up what they have achieved in the past. Lance is a very exciting prospect who will



Josh Hazlewood bowls in the nets during a practice session

Pat (Cummins) continues to improve, bowled with freedom on Saturday and appears likely to play this match, although Josh (Hazlewood) will need more time

GEORGE BAILEY

benefit from time with the squad."

Australia head into the first of three Tests against the Proteas

from Friday in red-hot form, having crushed the West Indies by 164 runs then 419 runs.

Australia squad: Pat Cummins (capt), Scott Boland, Alex Carey, Cameron Green, Marcus Harris, Travis Head, Usman Khawaja, Marnus Labuschagne, Nathan Lyon, Lance Morris, Michael Neser, Steve Smith, Mitchell Starc, David Warner

AFP

His Majesty's Hockey Cup begins

Muscat - The prestigious His Majesty's Hockey Cup 2022 began on Saturday with Sohar taking on Boushar in the opening match.

The second match of the day was held between Al Seeb and Al Nasr.

There are all together eight teams vying for the coveted trophy, the organisers said, adding that the teams were divided in two groups. While Sohar, Boushar, Al Nasr and Al Seeb are in Group A, Ahli Sidab, Nizwa, Salalah and Saham have been placed in Group B.

The top three teams from the two groups will progress to the second round which will also played in a round-robin format.

The top two teams from the second round will play in the final with the third and fourth placed teams fighting for the last place on the podium.

The matches will be played at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex, Boushar. The tournament will end on December 27.

Armando Broja knee injury adds to Chelsea worries

London, United Kingdom - Chelsea striker Armando Broja suffered a serious right knee injury during a 1-0 friendly loss to Aston Villa in Abu Dhabi on Sunday with manager Graham Potter admitting "it doesn't look positive".

The 21-year-old Albanian international was hurt when he collided with Villa's Ezri Konsa in the first half.

Broja was left screaming in pain before being taken off on a

stretcher.

"It was an unfortunate action, I think he got caught up with their player and the ground," Potter told Chelsea's official website.

"It doesn't look positive at the moment, but it is too early to say. Fingers crossed, but it is an awkward one."

Broja has made 12 appearances in the Premier League this season, 10 of them off the bench and scored one goal.

Chelsea will resume their Pre-

mier League season following the World Cup break on December 27 when they welcome Bournemouth to Stamford Bridge.

They are eighth in the table, 16 points behind leaders Arsenal after a three-game losing run.

White back in Arsenal training

Ben White returned to training with his Arsenal teammates in Dubai having left England's

World Cup squad midway through the tournament.

The English Football Association said the centre-back had left for "personal reasons", but a newspaper this week claimed that White's departure followed a row with assistant manager Steve Holland.

White was not involved in any of the Three Lions' three group games before leaving the camp in Qatar.

"Ben left for personal reasons.

We made that very clear and I think especially in this day and age it is very important that a situation like that is respected," said England boss Gareth Southgate on the eve of his side's quarter-final defeat to France on Saturday.

White had been given some time off by Arsenal before joining his teammates for a mid-season training camp ahead of the resumption of the Premier League on December 26.



Armando Broja